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LETTERS

AN ENGLISH BOY

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RICHARD BYRD LEVETT.

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LETTERS OF AN ENGLISH BOY

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MILFORD HALL.

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LETTERS OF AN ENGLISH BOY

BEING THE LETTERS OF

RICHARD BYRD LEVETT

KING'S ROYAL RIFLE CORPS

WHO DIED FOR ENGLAND, AT THE AGE OF NINETEEN, IN THE GREAT WAR. *MARCH* 10, 1917.

ETON COLLEGE
SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE AND CO. LTD.
1917

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'THE British Empire requires at the present time hard service from all her sons. It requires the hardest service from those to whom most has been given.'—*From the Reply of His Majesty the King to an Address from Eton College, July*, 1911.

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24 May 54 Hobart

PREFACE

THESE letters were originally put together for the members of Richard Levett's family, but it has been suggested that they might be read with interest by a wider circle, because they give such a very complete picture of one who was typical of those boys who, though they neither distinguish themselves at work or at play in their schooldays, yet enshrine in their hearts and lives those principles which have made us great as a nation, and which must, in the end, make us the dominating factor in the terrible struggle now going on around us. They show, too, the steps by which so many have passed from the careless world of boyhood, by the way of self-sacrifice, to the supreme offering of an unstained life upon the altar of their country.

Far from strong as a child, Dick was never able to take any very active part in games or sports whilst at school, and it was not until the last few years that he really overcame the drawbacks of his constitutional delicacy. With the outbreak of war he seemed to receive a definite

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call, after which he went forward with unswerving purpose to the goal. It is difficult to say what line he would have followed had he survived. He had a natural love of the traditions of the past which was born in him and which bordered on something sacred.

He was totally out of sympathy with the democratic spirit of the present day, though he possessed that rare charm of manner and the power of winning affection which can bridge over all differences and distinctions of class, and which were so well shown in the almost brotherly feeling which existed between him and his soldier servant in the last few months of his life.

His personality was one which might well stand as a justification of that past order of things, both educational and religious, which has too often been harshly and unsympathetically criticised by the new generation, to whom it seems so much more important 'To Do' than 'To Be.'

To many it may seem as if his life, so full of promise, had been cut off in its prime; but to those who knew him best and loved him most, his death, identifying him as it did with the mysterious purpose of God, and uniting him to the Redeemer of the human race, seems to be

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the most perfect and appropriate close to a life of which the mainspring had ever been loving-kindness and thought for others.

As one who understood him perfectly most truly said, on hearing that he had crossed the boundary: 'For himself his shining soul has only gone home: there can be no strangeness for him there'—and these words make a most fitting close to this chapter of his life, which one feels calmly confident is merely the preface to some higher and more important work on another plane.

M. S. L.

October 1917.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
First Letter from School	2
Letters from St. Peter's Court	4
Letters from Eton	10
Letters from Oxford	37
Letters from Tours	42
Letters from Sandhurst	52
Letters from Sheerness	59
Letters from France	71
Account of 'The Bapaume Ridge' and the Taking of Irles	161
Extracts from some Letters received after Dick's Death	169
Extracts from a Letter written by Dick to be given to his Parents in the Event of his Death	191

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

MILFORD HALL	*Frontispiece*	
DICK AND TEUFEL I. . . .	*To face p.*	1
DICK, AGED 10	,,	5
DICK, AGED 14	,,	13
DICK, AGED 16 (ETON VOLUNTEERS) .	,,	31
JACINTH WILMOT SITWELL (COLDSTREAM GUARDS)	,,	55
DICK, AGED 19 (KING'S ROYAL RIFLE CORPS)	,,	59
ALBERT CATHEDRAL, 1917. . .	,,	99

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NOTES

AMONG the names mentioned in these pages 'Dyonèse' is Dick's sister, and 'Jacinth' his cousin and all but brother—another only son—whose steps he followed stage by stage until the last, with the one difference that while Jacinth joined the Coldstream Guards in February 1915, dying of wounds on July 9, 1916, at the age of twenty-one, Dick joined the 60th Rifles in July 1916 and was killed in action in March 1917 at the age of nineteen.

Of these two it may well be said: 'Lovely and pleasant were they in their lives, and in their death they were not divided.'

Of the others, 'Mr. Cappell' was the curate to whom Dick first went for lessons under the guardianship of 'old Richardson,' the old carter whose daily pride and pleasure it was to walk with him to the village. 'Mother Jack' is his old nurse (so called after Holbein's sketch at Windsor of the nurse of Edward VI), with whom he kept in constant touch to the last. 'Gregory' was the boys' maid at 'Stone's,' and 'Harry'

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nominally the 'keeper' at the Hall, but in reality the friend without whom nothing inside or outside the house could be done, and to whom Dick was dear as a son.

'Teufel' I and II have been, successively, the dear friends and constant companions of the whole family.

With very few exceptions these letters were written to Dick's father and mother jointly, a practice which started when, as a little boy, he was afraid 'the one who was left out might be hurt,' and kept up till his last letter from the trenches.

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DICK AND TEUFEL I.

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LETTERS OF AN ENGLISH BOY

TELEGRAM RECEIVED AT MILFORD HALL.

May 30, 1897. London. 6.20.

Boy born this evening. Mother and son both very well.

Letter dictated.

1900.

Dear Daddy—I have fed the rabbits and carried the Kitty in my pinefore.

1901.

MY DEAR MUMMY AND DADDY DID YOU GET TO WALES QUITE SAFELY AND I HOPE THE TRAIN DID NOT GET SNOWED UP. WHAT DO YOU THINK CAME THIS MORNING BY POST TO ME SUCH NICE SHREWSBURY CAKES I WONDER WHO SENT THEM.

A KISS.

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February 1904.

Thank you very much for the 1/6. I shall be very rich now. I shall be able to go First Class wen I go to Stafford. It is 5.45 now and we are writing without a lamp. The Irish mail is just geting into London has it gets ther at 5.48. Mr. Cappell has been telling me all about the coral and how it is maid. With a hug to both of you from

R. B. L.

Teufel is a little better but very sorry for himself.

First Letter from School.

North Foreland House, February 1906.

I hope you had a nice journey up to London. Thank you both so much for your nice letters. I was so sorry not to see you again yesterday. I sleped very well the night I came as well as last night. We are allowed to have sweets here. We went for a little walk as far as the Light-house. Please tell Baby that I will write soon to her. If I have time after your letter I am writing to Nanny. The boys who slepe next me their names are Dick and Derrick. I have not yet made up my mind who I like best. I must stop now as I have to go and play Hockey.

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NORTH FORELAND HOUSE, May 1906.

Thank you so much for your lovely stockings and letters you made them so nicely. I am not top in the lower form nor getting half so much better I mean the other day in Latin I lost 11 marks I mean to say because I could not decline Lord I lost five marks and then another five and then one for making a word up of my own as Miss Mary always says I am doing I have gone down in the weekly order too places that is to say instead of being third I am fife but I am top in history and writing also in attenshine again. A few days ago I got the stick for the first time because I forgot to put my sun book and block I did not like it at all I am afraid you will not quite know about my marks on the other page it is that I am not such a good boy in some lessons though I try to do so The days seem very long and nasty excep Saterday and Sunday I hope Baby looks after my black children Has Harry found out my hiding place where I hid my boxes and my puppies and is his little neuter child Mr. or Mrs. I call it neuter because I do not know which gender it is. Give my love to the puppies and say that I hope the time will soon fly past so that I can see them. I miss Daddy very much at night.

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1906.

Thank you so very much for the very nice letter and the good news that you are coming down so I shall get a nice lot of you. I think you will be pleased to hear I have tried so hard to get top in Latin and also in the weekly order that it has ended that I am top in the weekly order and I am very glad I am top in Latin. I cannot believe that half term is so near it is next week. Yesterday 11 torpetos came by they looked as if they would never come to an end there were so many of them. I have made up my mind now who I like best and who least thou the one I like best nows that I do and the one I like least thinks I like him best becous I did when I came.

LETTERS FROM ST. PETER'S COURT.

1906.

I hope you got my letter I wrote yesterday. We have been for a walk this afternoon round Kingsgate Castle. We went to Church this morning and had a very nice service. Mr. Ridgway preached, he told us all about we should not pull a long face and not amuse ourselves like the puritons so solum you know he said enjoy yourself only think about the solum

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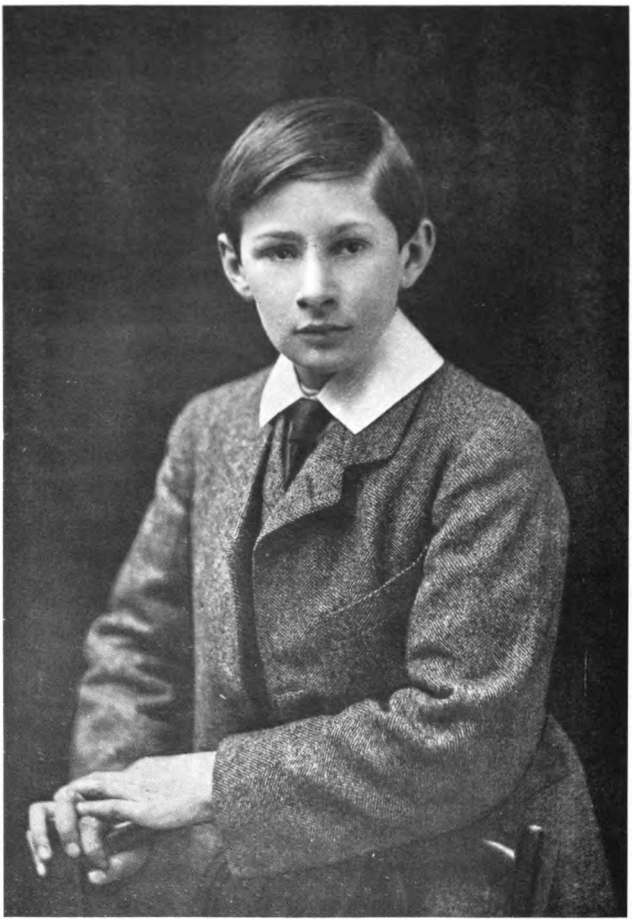

DICK, aged 10.

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side of things too and he took it from the marriage of Canna. I have written to old Richardson and Granny to-day. Give my love to everyone and to yourself.

1907.

Thank you so much for your letters. This is my last letter I am glad to say, only to Tuesday. I did very well in the arithmetic exam 93 %. Miss Orpheur was very pleased as the others did so badly and she said I showed what her form could do. I don't know if I told you I got a very nice book out of the Library called 'The Dragon of Pekin' all about the Boxer Revolts. I am rather dreading to-morrow as the prizes are given out and I have one and I have not the least idea what to do and it's rather awkward. We had the great supper last night. . . . Two helpings of chicken and ham two of swiss roll one of cherries and I was going to have another only grace was said before I got it, not very large considering the others six of pudding and so on.

1908.

Thank you so much for your letter. The Exams began for the lower forms on Thursday. Just think only 9 more days 216 hours from

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to-morrow to the end of the term. Who is going to meet me at Victoria. Can't I come alone I know perfectly what to do and without any fussy guards. You have to find your luggage get a 4 wheeler and drive to Euston get a bun and get into the train and as long as I don't go near the door which I won't I am perfectly all right. We had a lovely lecture on Waterloo last night. It was simply lovely and he gave it so well. I have no more news so good-bye.

1909.

Thank you very much for your letter. I am very sorry that my letter was so untidy only we went for a long walk and only had a quarter of the time for our letters. The whole of Friday and Saterday it has been snowing and to-day with the most awful East wind there is about an inch and a half lying and if it goes on we shall have a snow-ball fight to-morrow which I hope we shall. On Friday I went back to my dormitary as 6 measleites have come down. What are you giving up for Lent ? I am giving up marmalade and biting my pencil. The other day we had some reproduction on the wolf. The master reads it out and then you have to write it out in your own words. I thought you would like to see mine I got top marks. I am al-

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ready making plans for the holidays and am looking forward to them *immensely*. No more news to-day.

In our dormitary we have started a debating society we had done so at the begining of the term only I forgot to tell you. We make speeches on Wednesday nights and I am making an extra one to-morrow as it is Empire Day. At the end of every month a paper is edited and gives the speeches, comments etc. so far we have had one on the Navy and one on the Budget. The Sermon on Sunday was about Empire Day and was very good. There is a wreck on the Goodwins [*Murata* between India and London] and you can hire a boat and see it but I am afraid it will sink before the Paters match when you will be here. If Daddy comes down he would like it much better than the match. I hear Jacinth likes Eton very much. I have six letters to write to-day, one to Sergeant Southcomb, but we have been out for a long walk so they will be very short ones.

ST. PETER'S COURT, 1910.

This is just after breakfast on the day you sailed. I wish I knew what time your boat went

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because I like to know just where you are. I was thinking last night in bed how nice it would be to go to France if only you came home at the same time as the school ends and you came back to Calais. I could come over to see what France was like for perhaps 2 or 3 days if you stayed at some little country place near Calais. The latest amusement is putting advertisements in the photo frames of boys not yet back they always leave their frames, and now instead of a loving mother is Monkey Brand etc. I see there is a dreadful accident to a ship crossing to Algiers from Marseilles. How thankful I am that you changed your mind from going straight across and that the Paris train was booked you might have gone across on the General Chanzy.

March 1910.

How interesting to have seen your first airship in the air. I have only seen one on the ground at Selfridges. How kind of you to think of me in getting the Principality of Monaco's stamps and how clever of you to know they were different to the French ones. Mr. Richardson told me yesterday that I go to Eton in January. I hope you have had a nice Easter day. Thank you so much for your delightful letter and the

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violets, also the dear little cross which I have put in my bible. You can't imagine how pleased I was to get a packet of letters for Easter. I don't at all like staying here over Holy week Good Friday and Easter Sunday because it is the first time I have been away from home at that time. Just think only till the 6th of April and then the term will end. Every night I make plans for the holidays.

May 1910.

How very dreadful about the poor King and so very sudden and Queen Alexandra must be dreadfully upset. We are wearing black bands on our arms and have a memorial service at 10.15 on Friday when the procession starts.

Could you please send me some flowers as I am going to try to have a nice garden this year. Prince Henry comes after the funeral and is going to be in my garden which will be very exciting.

Thank you very much for your letter. I should be very glad to have any news about the Portuguese Revolution out of the *Times* if you could save me any, the Japanese interested me very much.

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I am sorry you think that I am rather discontented. Perhaps I am rather but I don't think seriously. Of course I am looking forward to Eton immensely and am rather tired of this place but I shall be really very sorry to leave it when it comes to the time. I am glad to think that Mr. Richardson thinks that I have a good influence. I think and hope I have a little and that it is good. Good night dear old Marm.

Thank you so much for your letter and the telegram. I am so glad to hear Mr. Lloyd[1] got in again though with a reduced majority. I was hoping that you would telegraph.

Mr. Richardson will have told you that I have taken middle fourth. He is quite pleased as I could not have taken anything higher and might have done worse especially as I was not feeling very well the second day of the exam. I am very glad about the election.

LETTERS FROM ETON.

February 1911.

I had written to you last night but I missed the post so I am writing again. I have bought a deck chair and a mantle board which is going to be fixed up to-morrow. May I have an order

[1] George Lloyd, elected for West Staffs., 1910.

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for Rowlands, for teas etc. during the half. I am sending you the paper thing to fill in and will you send it to Rowland at Barnes Bridge as the other is farther away and more crowded I believe. I am afraid I have spent a good deal of money so far to-day as the chair, cushion and mantlepiece cost the best part of ½ a sovereign and I bought a 6*d*. bottle of marmalade and a 6*d*. glass pot of potted meat but I shan't want to buy such expensive things as chairs etc. when I get settled down and shan't need to buy tea if I have an order. Goodnight and write *very* often.

We had great fun yesterday. We went for a paper chase. We all got soaked as we had to go through most terribly muddy streams which were very wide too. It was a house one which a few lower boys had originated. There were only 8 counting the two hares so that it was great fun and we had a nice hot shower bath when we came in. I was so glad that I saw the aeroplane as I have never seen one flying before it made a most extraordinary noise and though I was a good long way from it one heard it quite distinctly it looked like a large dragon fly and it acted splendidly I should think and it looked so graceful. All the rooks round the

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castle were very much upset as it came quite near their nests. I have played fives three times last week. I am not much good at it yet as it is very difficult to allow for all the angles etc. It's a splendid game and is such a nice change from what I should be playing at Broadstairs—hockey.

On Monday I went to learn to shoot with a rifle though we only learnt to take sights etc. Shooting is compulsory here, so I hope that with twice a week practise I shall be able to shoot rooks when I come home though I expect that is very different from a target, they are miniature rifles, like they use at the schools I think and one fires within a large 'drill hall' at fairly short ranges.

Thank you so much for your letter and the charming photograph. I will have a cheap edition of myself done if you like and send some to you the usual sort or at least the fashionable way. Bathing started yesterday and I bathed yesterday evening and this morning before breakfast which we are allowed to do on Sundays. It was glorious. I am so glad I can swim as there is no crush at all in the deep end. My new socks are shot mauve and green and are beautiful. I am sure you will admire them.

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DICK, aged 14.

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I am longing to see you on the 4th or rather the 3rd when I hope you will appear. Yes it will be much better if you can get rooms in Eton or Windsor it will certainly be much less tiring. I am afraid that we have no chance of getting seats at the speeches which all the sixth form make but I don't expect they would interest any of us much as most of them are in Latin and Greek. But I believe the proper thing to do is to come to Absence for some extraordinary reason. I am sure we should have great fun and Dyonèse would love seeing 'Palley' and 'Pal, Pall, Palle' on the desks in Lower School!!! and we could have tea in my room, then there are fireworks in the evening and a torch light procession I believe. Please excuse me writing on this paper but I have no other and I have had to make a bit from a sheet of 'broadrule.'

June 4, 1911.

I hope you got home safely to-day (Sunday) we had a very nice time didn't we though perhaps it would have been better if it had been less full. After you left I went back to the fireworks but there was not very much more. I hope that Dyonèse didn't feel ill after her strawberry messes etc. and that you weren't

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too tired. To-day has been 50 times hotter than the 3rd quite unendurable and not a speck of rain. I am afraid that you can't have a very long letter to-day as there isn't *much* news! I really enjoyed yesterday enormous and I hope you did. You will remember Absence and the little gate!!! Wasn't it *awful*.

Thank you so much for your letter. I am very proud of you having instigated sending out copies of the King's Speech. Every boy in the school has one. They are very nicely done and I will bring mine home for you to see. To-day has been boiling and yesterday was 90 in the shade, too frightfully hot. I had a splendid view of the King when inspecting the Corps—he came within two yards of me but the crowds were the worst part. They all looked very nice and a very nice band played to us while we waited in our places.

How nice to think that there is so little time before the holidays and how delightful if I am going to bathe.

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Reply of His Majesty the King to an Address from the School.

July 1, 1911.

I thank you on behalf of the Queen and myself for the address of welcome which has been read to us from the King's Scholars and Oppidans of Eton College and School. It is a great pleasure to us to visit Eton again and to receive, so soon after the solemn ceremony of our Coronation, the assurance of the loyalty and devotion to the Crown which is one of the firmest traditions of your school. Here you enjoy many advantages in the education you receive and in the circumstances of your lives.

The British Empire requires at the present time hard service from all her sons. It requires the hardest service from those to whom most has been given. You will, I am sure, in the course of your lives lose no opportunity of rendering service to your country and to the nation. These opportunities occur in times of peace as often as in times of war. In seizing them and turning them to the fullest advantage you will be able to take your part in the work which my people have to do all over the world, and so continue to send out from these historic walls men as great and as useful as those who have gone before.

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I shall always take a keen interest in Eton, not only in memory of this ancient Royal foundation but as a neighbour and a friend. I am confident that in the future you will never forget that upon you rests the responsibility of upholding the honour of Eton and her world-wide fame.

Thank you so much for the excellent box of provisions. I am just devouring the gingerbreads which are excellent. I played squash raquets yesterday or at least tried to learn and I think that I shall like it very much it will also help me with my tennis I should think. This afternoon I am going to m' tutor's daughter's christening and there is to be a christening tea afterwards. I don't know what she is going to be called yet. The boys all gave her a little pendant and brooch of some mauve coloured stones but I can't remember the name.

Yesterday m' tutor went to the Court to give evidence against the man who stole his food in the holidays. I daresay you remember he left a message saying, 'the food was eatable, but the hock very bad' or something like that, he got 3 years P.S. he has had three previous

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convictions but that seems a very long time for such a slight offence, don't you think so.

You will be glad to hear that :

1. My accounts are still quite correct.
2. I have not been late at all.
3. I have not failed in anything so far this half.

I don't seem so tired this half which I know you will say was the bathing. I have just come back from the doctor who I had to see on account of my breathlessness but it was only one of those periodical attacks. I don't think I shall have to play football but I expect it will be my unhappy lot to play goal ! There seems to be great trouble in China. I wonder if they will have a Republic. I should like to go there before they do as they are certain to alter all the interesting things that happened in ' the Empresses Life ' etc. I suppose you wouldn't like me to go into tails for leave. I really am much too tall for jackets now and I should have to go in next half as already my sleeves are halfway up to my elbows. This morning it really was quite foggy and horribly cold and damp and the summer *really* gone but one goes on saying that till the next one comes so that it is not much to judge by.

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Thank you so much for the shirts and chickens which arrived safely and have each been put away in their respective places. I am rather glad you couldn't come down for St. Andrew's day as it is all remarkably dull from your point of view and you'd have been bored to death and frozen. I watched the wall game for a little time one has to climb upon top of THE wall about 12 ft. high and cling there while the players all push about underneath. It's rather a farce as no one except the players understand the least what is happening and all one can see is 22 people shoving each other against a wall and wearing the most extraordinary kinds of corduroy trousers and caps with great pads on.

I have been staying out but I got up this morning and am all right now and going down to lunch but I am afraid I shan't be allowed into school to-morrow or play fives etc. I don't think it had anything to do with Saint Andrew's day, as I was quite ordinarily watching an extraordinarily dull match but it was a horrible foggy day. It is rather nice being in a room so near Upper Chapel that on Sunday you can hear all the services going on, Anthems etc. How glorious to think of the holidays. I think the Perth express is the first I can reach home by if only m' tutor would let me go early I could get the 7.10 from Euston.

. . .

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1912.

This afternoon Biddulph and I are going up to the terrace of the Castle with my telescope to look round at the floods which I believe are really worth seeing from there they are quite enormous and I daresay you saw something in the papers about them as I noticed even the *Times* deigned to mention them. And then if possible we shall go up the Round Tower but I much doubt if it is open till later though last year when I went up I remember there was snow.

Eton is looking so pretty now with all the trees out. It is curious why they should come out so much sooner here than at home.

I have to-day ordered Spottiswood to send you 'The Light invisible' which I found there, I think you will like it. I must tell you the result of the race. I had 'Eton two' station, that is to say looking up stream 2 from the Eton side and 4 from the Windsor Bank and got quite a good start in spite of the wind which was blowing broadside on. I managed to keep just second for the first few yards and then dropped to third where I remained till half way e.g. the rypeck only I got round the rypeck behind no. 4, and

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couldn't catch him up again. I think if I had only been able to get the inside side of the rypeck without taking up his water I might have come home third. I am sorry not to have got a better place but I get so appallingly breathless. I am going in for the Lower Boy sculling on the 24th which I hope will be more successful.

I went for a lovely ride in Windsor park on my velo. yesterday, which really is *too lovely* now, up to the copper horse who is George 3rd. The red deer were making the most frightful bellowing and all the squirrels and rabbits were playing about in quantities. I have got a coloured map of the seat of war which I am sending to Dyonèse though I dare say she has got a better one. My own bicycle hasn't arrived yet, but I hope it is on its way. I go to m' tutor to-night for the first confirmation class there are seven of us to be confirmed I think.

I hope you haven't been expecting to hear from me, but I have had a good many things to do since I returned from Broadstairs. I arrived at Paddington at 12.45 on Saturday and under-

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grounded to Victoria and went down by my dear old friend, or enemy, the 'Granville Express.' I arrived at about 5.30 and walked up to the house where I found Mrs. Ridgway entertaining a party of boys which always takes place on Saturday evening and was always a great treat. We all went over to St. Peter's Court for tea and a lantern lecture and after that went to Chapel for the little evening service which they have and so on to dinner. After morning service on Sunday I had a very nice walk with Mr. Richardson down to the sea and I came up Monday by the 10 train. I have been able to get some delightful rides lately as there is a very nice signalman who lets me go up in his box and signal the trains and I generally call and see a few of the expresses pass. Yesterday I went nearly to Virginia Water. The Park is really too lovely now the pheasants and deer are innumerable and the earth seems to move with rabbits. The trees are just in a lovely yellow state and the whole place is simply beautiful—a velocipede gives one such a much greater range in which one can get about.

Thank you so much for your letter. It was so delightful having you down here, and I wish

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I *was* going to meet the 12.43 *next* Saturday. I am so glad you enjoyed being here so much, the quieter days are so much the nicest. I think I have a very satisfactory fortnightly report to give you. In mathematics I was 1/19 but I am afraid I shan't be able to keep that place as the master says if the people who were 2nd and 3rd did any work at all they would be top with some ease! The headmaster came round on Friday and on looking at this week's Latin Prose, instead of saying that it was a good thing I was staying out as he did last half, he mentioned that mine was amongst the best and showed a great improvement on last half and said 'it showed how much could be done by trying even at Latin Prose at Eton,' which I was rather pleased at.

1913.

You ask about Upper Chapel. The service is nice, specially some of the music but the knife board is most frightfully uncomfortable and you can hear nothing of the prayers. I have just been having a great bargaining with someone about some stamps, I am rather glad I brought my collection back though as far as I can make

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out my catalogue has been stolen already. The river is still very high and strong and we are not allowed out in anything except ' dodgers ' rather dull work as I want to try my rigger. The weather is appalling and it has rained every day. The Castle is opened to-day for the first time for some months by the King's special order. I hope the Suffragettes won't do any mischief. The recruit drill is going on beautifully we have got to the rifle stage and we hope to pass out by the 4th of June. The King is coming down on the 16th of June and I believe we are to have an extra week's holiday.

The heat here is frightful—and I am thankful to have kept my back room—I wonder if there is going to be another 1911 summer. Yesterday I went up to Queens Eyot near Monkey Island, there is a club up there where you can get an excellent tea. Four of us went in a gig taking it in turns to row and got back at 7.30. We could drift the whole way down though the row up was rather hard work. Absence is called up there so you needn't be back before lock up.

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We had our dress parade in front of the adjutant on Thursday and my second hand clothes look quite nice. We hope to pass out into the real Volunteers on Wed. 4th before Chapel and before parents etc. begin to arrive. I do hope that I shall manage all right but unfortunately I stayed out the four drills when they started the skirmishing drill and I am not very certain what the signals mean. I got two excellent photographs of Miss Evans in the school Library yesterday. I gave the first one 15 mins. exposure and the other 20 mins. I haven't enlarged them yet as the lantern is broken. I am rather afraid that in putting the plates in (in the dark) I rather pugged them and in the enlargement this may show. Of course it is rather a dark subject as she is dressed in black and the light in the hall is not very good at best. I am going to try and get leave to take some photographs in the Chapel and in the College dining hall but I find that one must get leave from the Provost and headmaster to go anywhere near the Chapel with a camera though I don't think they could forbid me to take any. Last week has been hateful as there is school every afternoon to stop boys going to Ascot and this ruins the whole afternoon as far as the river is concerned.

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I am so glad to hear that Aunty Mouse was pleased with her day here on the 4th. I was rather afraid that she might be disappointed at my missing her after the procession of boats but you know what the crowd is that day. The weather was lovely not too hot. The airship Beta came down on Agars Plough but we didn't see it and then it came right over the school yard during Absence and was greeted with cheers and the men in it waved and then it went away again. There was an aeroplane down too but I didn't see that. On Wednesday I think if the weather is fine I shall go to the Windsor Agricultural Show. The King comes to Windsor that day and I think will be there. I must try and take some photographs. The 'Passing Out' into the Corps went off quite well and now I am in the corps: we have a parade every Monday morning but as ill luck will have it I just come in for the one to-morrow when the Col. of the Coldstreams inspects our company for the Company cup. The company was prepared for it last Monday before I had passed out, but I don't think I have missed much.

I don't know what you like doing about Lords but I shall be perfectly happy at home

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if you don't want to come up to London. The King's day was a great success most awfully hot but I saw everything beautifully and he gave us an extra week which is a great thing. Earl's Court sounds a delightful trip I think, but perhaps you don't. How very nice to think we meet on Friday.

I meant to have written yesterday to say that m' tutor had been round and wanted to know if either I or you were anxious or willing that I should take up science instead of French: my name has been sent in as a possible 'changer' with advantage, though I don't think that there is much object in this, however if you would prefer me to give up French please communicate with me and I will make the necessary arrangements. I went out on the river again to-day and bathed, really there is a second summer here. I see on the new chapel list that I am off the knife board which is a relief, two halves is quite enough. My curtain is up and is a great success. Tell 'Minnie' Moon that it looks charming. I quite see that K—— is going to begin a reign of terror, he set the whole of Henry VII's reign to be learnt immediately on seeing his unfortunate division and he expects you to get about 75%

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right out of about 50 *horrible* questions. We had a curious preacher this morning, the Bishop of North and Central Europe—rather a wide diocese it sounds doesn't it? I saw old L—— this morning who seemed pleased to see me and I am just off to his garden which looks very pretty even now.

Let me have some news soon.

The fortnightly order comes out to-morrow, but you mustn't expect too much, it being my first half in C. The one thing old K—— compliments me on is History and I generally get full marks in that, about everything else he keeps silent! I think it is really best to go on with the French this half as though I dare say the French I shall learn here will not be of much use, (I mean I should probably have to go abroad to learn it properly) it may teach me something whilst I don't quite see what science ends in. We have our first field day on the 17th, and I am rather looking forward to it. I believe we go to Oxford. Jacinth writes that he is very happy there.

We had great fun on Friday. We marched to the L. & S.W.R. station at Windsor and

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there entrained in our special train for Sunningdale not far from Farnborough. When we arrived we marched to our rendezvous and then sat down to listen to the plan of attack. We had to take a position 1300 yards away in open order rushing every two hundred yards and then lying down and firing our blank cartridges.

When the first ridge had been taken the enemy retired to another hill very nearly the same distance off again, about 1400 yards from their first position, and the same thing happened again. It doesn't sound a very long day but it was on very rough ground and the walking or rather running was extremely heavy. We were inspected by an army man who was much struck and said that he wished he had such a foundation to build the army on, only I daresay that was his stock phrase. At any rate he was pleased and thought it all very satisfactory. At 2 P.M. we all sat down and lunch was given us, sausage roll, cheese and biscuits in a paper bag and buckets of ginger beer. The whole day was a short one lasting from 9 A.M. to 4.30 and was great fun.

On Tuesday evening we had a most charming lecture by Commander Evans on the Polar

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Expedition. The school hall was *crammed* though at first they proposed having it in the little Queen's school lecture Room. I was right up in the gallery at the back but heard perfectly as he spoke very slowly. The slides were lovely and some of them *most* interesting and I think it was the most delightful lecture I have ever seen. I do wish you could have seen it. The Field day on Tuesday was quite fun only it was a horrible float, we were thoroughly wiped out by the enemy who although killed took no notice and would insist on rising from the dead and attacking us again.

Denman and I have been busy in the College Library, rummaging about. The Vice Provost kindly gave me leave to go in and it is the most interesting place. Yesterday I found two letters, (printed in a book) written, to prove that King Charles wrote the Eiken Basilica and signed (Savernak) 'Will Levet'[1] which I had never seen before.

1914.

I have at last got the books Caesar and Xenophon to be done for Responsions and am going to start them to-morrow as m' tutor allows me to do them instead of doing private if I also

[1] William Levett was page to Charles I. and was on the scaffold with him when executed.—M. S. L.

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do some in my own time. I have purchased 'the auto-car handbook,' all about the engines of a car: it is most interesting but a little difficult to understand, but I am plodding through it and think by the time I have finished it I shall know a little about the Sunbeam works. Yesterday we had a river picnic, great fun. We bathed underneath old Windsor weir where the water was enormously strong afterwards we had an excellent tea. Some very nice cars have been passing on their way to Ascot which makes up for its inconveniences. C—— asked me to go in a cab which he was driving to Ascot!!! I don't know if he ever got there or not. I rather think he never started. We go to Camp on July 19.

MITCHETT FARM CAMP, July 1914.

I hope you got my wire. Everything is very vague: as war is declared between Germany and Russia. I suppose England must mobilise in which case we shall either return suddenly or have to stay here later: as it is all our mackintosh sheets have been commandeered and our 'officer umpires' go back to their regiments to-morrow I think. We had a field night last night: rather fun on the whole. We set out at 8 o'clock and arriving at our trenches at about

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DICK, aged 16.
Eton Volunteers.

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9 P.M. we sat there till 10.30 and then returned without seeing the enemy.

However, to let off our feelings every one let off their blank cartridges nominally in the air which was very dangerous. Several people had their faces covered with burnt powder and singed. We had a service this morning at 9.15 A.M. but it was extremely short as it was pouring with rain. The food on the whole is not bad for camp, by far the worst trial is the dust: black grit several inches deep on all the roads and after a long march everyone's face is covered in a kind of mask. The continual washing in cold water has resulted in everyone breaking out in scales! To my great surprise my nights have been quite peaceful: the first night I didn't sleep at all but since then with great success except when I clasped Denman round the waist in the middle of the night thinking it was my great coat wrapped in an extremely dirty towel which takes the place of a pillow which caused a considerable amount of confusion as you can imagine as we were 8 in the tent.

I heard from 'Melle'[1] yesterday thanking me for calling on her. She seems very much upset about Rheims Cathedral. It must be awful

[1] Melle Martin, Dyonèse's French governess.

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to have one's Westminster Abbey burnt. Most of the houses here are more or less emptied as far as the higher up people go. I see they say in the *Observer* that the winter programme for Zeppelins is to bombard London! There was a voluntary intercession service in the Chapel on Thursday night to which lower boys were allowed to come. The Chapel was *crammed* not an inch of room left. I see the 60th were awfully cut up the other day—15 officers altogether wounded or dead—awful. Jacinth is coming over from Sandhurst to-morrow I believe as he wrote and asked me to invite him to dinner—as his company Commander must see his invitation before he is allowed leave. I believe the juniors get pretty well crushed there which isn't much fun after Oxford.

Have you heard from 'Mother Jack' lately. I wrote about 10 days ago to ask why she had never answered the letter I wrote her in the holidays. I wrote to Mr. Richardson to thank him for various 'School Notes' etc. the other day and asked him if he knew of any vacant place as school matron which would suit her. I wonder what you think about Smalls. I must say I rather favour making a try for it at Christ-

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mas as I think I have a chance of passing—also what about the Army? I think I ought to do something if I leave at the end of this half as it is different to being at Eton. Of course at present I am rather young I suppose, but what is the age limit for the King's Army? I suppose the militia wouldn't be any use. I went to the doctor the other night to see him about the medical and I could pass in everything. Our field day was rather fun—we had lunch on the cricket ground of Radley school and walked all round the school afterwards. This morning the old Bishop of Hereford preached: aged 80. This evening we have 'O for the wings of a dove' my favourite anthem. I have sent home some rags of pyjamas: the new ones want to be much longer legs and sleeves otherwise the same.

The 7th was Founders day and we had all the prayers for the old benefactors in chapel, Latin Psalms etc. and also all the names of the Etonians killed in the war read out, an awful long list. I am afraid next half will be awfully dull if I am still here. *Everyone* is leaving—one house for instance had 10 people *extra* to the ordinary number leaving at the end of the summer half who left during the holidays and 6 more are leaving in a few days! I think 5 are leaving m' tutor's.

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1915.

It is bitterly cold here and I don't much like early school after the holidays, but think of the trenches! My Oxford responsions exam. is on March 16–18 and Matriculation or passing into Magdalen 19–20.

Yesterday was speech day. Speeches are rather amusing, they are held the three first Saturdays in each half in Upper school. All the boys in 1st hundred and Upper Div. sit round the walls and in the back half, benches are ranged across the room on which the surplus sit. In front are 4 chairs, the Head, Provost, Vice-Provost and the Lower Master. At the stroke of 11.30 they all walk in in their robes and everyone gets up and they all sit down in their chairs. There is always a vacant one for the Provost who doesn't come now. It is rather interesting to think of all the 6th form who have made their speeches there and of all the people who have sat in that room and carved their names on the walls.

My one terror now is that I shall break out with German measles at Oxford. I think that there is every chance as the whole school is down with it, 17 cases in one house in one day!

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We had a most excellent Concert here last night in aid of comforts for the French troops, in the school Hall. A most *heavenly* day here to-day just like summer: a man came over for lunch in an aeroplane on to Agars Plough but in going up again ran into a tree and broke his wing so couldn't leave till to-morrow. I really have not got time to write as I have heaps of Xenophon to do! I go to Oxford Sunday. I telegraphed to Granny for her birthday as I was too busy to write.

OXFORD, March 19.

Very many thanks for your letter. No sign of 'Hun pox' yet. Latin Grammar, Prose and arithmetic over. I think I ought to have passed in the former and in the arithmetic I got 9 out of 10 sums quite right so that is safe. Oxford is so nice and peaceful that I don't feel I want to leave it again. I have succeeded in not becoming fuddled so far, and the man who keeps the rooms we are in was *speechless* with astonishment when he found Eley[1] and I were both prepared for bed by 10.30 last night. We do our papers in the Sheldonian theatre, a very fine place. There is nothing but Jews and wealthy baboos here now, the place is deserted.

[1] Derrick Eley, 1st Batt. K.R.R.C. Killed in action, February 1917. See p. 143.

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I dine in College this evening with two other Etonians. Matric takes place to-morrow, Viva-voce examinations more Latin Prose and every sort of horror. I will let you know immediately I know the result. I return to Eton Saturday and shall be glad to be back as it is rather dull now Eley is gone, though we have had very nice rooms.

Telegram

OXFORD G.W.R., March 20.

Passed everything in Responsions.

Last Letter from Eton.

Sunday, March 22.

I arrived here last night about 8 o'clock by catching a late train. I am very glad I passed and I hope I shall get into Magdalen alright. The Examination (Matriculation) was really rather difficult. However Smalls is by far the most important. I will let you know when I arrive Tuesday—about tea I expect.

Telegram

ETON, March 24.

Have passed matric Magdalen.

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LETTERS FROM OXFORD.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE, April 1915.

I hope you got my card announcing my safe arrival. I have got rooms in St. Swithen's Court, No. V., the ones we went in I think. They are quite nice. The only other freshman up this term is also on this staircase and he hails from America. The only rules to be observed as far as the College is concerned are that three times a week you must either sign your name in the porter's Lodge or go to Chapel or sign your name at the baths before 8.0 A.M. I imagine that they go on the principle that cleanliness is next to godliness. One goes to the baths in dressing gown etc. and as they are situated at the other end of the cloisters I should think it was rather a cold job in winter. You also have to attend one Chapel on Sundays. I have been forced to purchase a 'gown' and mortar board though the latter is never worn, but in hall for dinner, chapel etc. one has to wear the wretched little gown: it is about the length of one's coat with streamers hanging down and a collar such as was fashionable a little time ago sticking straight up behind the neck! The formal matriculation takes place on Tuesday so till then I am not really a member of the

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University: I think you have to swear various things only to wear black or sub-fusc etc. I have been out on the river this afternoon (the Cher) there are a lot of punts and canoes belonging to Magdalen which is nice. Breakfast takes place in Common Room from 8 A.M. to 9.30, Lunch in your own room, tea must be made and provided by yourself and dinner in Hall at 7.30. Hope to see you here soon——

Many thanks for letters, clothes and my grandfather's cigarette case. It is a very fine piece of armour though somewhat heavy, but one comfort is that if I ever get to the front I shall be more or less safe if I wear it next my heart. I have made arrangements to ride here so will you send the pair of boots from my room which look most suited to that form of amusement. The May morning Psalm singing took place yesterday and I was woken at 4.0 A.M. but by mistake went to sleep till 5.30 when everything was over except the 'jangling' of bells which quite prevented my sleeping again. It is rather a pity not to have seen it. I think the 29 odd people up here are without exception the most curious collection I have ever seen—half composed of gentlemen

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who call themselves 'asthetes.' What they do I don't quite understand but they don't *care* about enlisting. There are 3 Greeks, a few infirm, and some Americans who are nice.

I am looking out for a 'Burgess.' I looked at and tried a 'Royal Enfield' but have not recovered yet—I think my heart must have got dislodged—most awful shaking. Will you either send or bring with you my pedigree book 'Ancestral Tablets'—it is in my burry. Let me know when you arrive—Till Wednesday.

K. is making enquiries for me about Brittany. I could get on with my French and perhaps find someone there who would take me on with German. He thinks it might be possible. I think I shall go over to Eton on Sunday to see what people are doing in the holidays.

I had a very nice day at Eton on Sunday. Jacinth came over from Windsor and took me back in his car. I had lunch with m' tutor and after lunch rushed round seeing various people and went to tea with Todd who was very kind and nice. I then went to Chapel which I much enjoyed after these services here. I went

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to lunch at Christ Church yesterday with an Ex-Etonian, very nice—but his friends! All Aesthetes—one an Irishman wore a green tie with a tie pin looking like the silver badge of a Highland regiment on the glengarry, a frilled shirt, swede shoes, purple socks and a *white cape* slung from his shoulders down to his heels and a ring with a purple stone the size of a 2/- bit. Oh—save me from the Aesthetes, I prefer the Hun. K—— has not yet heard from Brittany. I hope to goodness we can arrange something otherwise what do you suggest. I might get a motor cycle despatch carrier job in England or go to Sandhurst earlier. Gregory was very pleased to see me again.

Still no answer from France but one thing is certain. I *must* have an 'automobile Velocipede' even if I don't go out to France I should *have* to have one in England and I might get a motor despatch rider commission temporarily. I am thinking of writing to my godmother to ask her to help in the matter as a 'Christening present.' I went to Reading last week to see a second hand one I saw advertised. The first day I tried to go I just missed the train at Oxford after a most awful rush because a wretched

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female ticket clipper wouldn't let me go through without a ticket and the next day after a most miserable journey I got there only to find the shops shut !

I am writing to-night as if the weather is kind I hope to get over to Eton to-morrow. I am looking forward very much to going as this week has been very depressing, wet days and what not. The casualty lists are so awful they rather depress one—in yesterday's list I knew 4 killed and 1 missing, two of whom were at Broadstairs with me and 3 killed the day before one also I knew very well.

What an *awful* train smash too this evening.

I had my first riding lesson this afternoon—the first man I was going to has gone away with the Yeomanry and I had to go to a new man, late riding master to the Blues, who seems very good. I have been trying to find a place to practise shooting with a revolver but I don't think there is one anywhere here. Windram has a large Colt and it may be useful to be able to shoot with one. I had a very nice bathe yesterday morning before breakfast, rather cold but very invigorating !

Do you think as there is no answer from Brittany it is worth writing to Tours.

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I have found a nice little bicycle fairly cheap and if I can manage it after all bills etc. are paid I shall get it and give my push bicycle in part payment so you *may* see me arrive by road next week.

Supposing I could get *temporarily* attached to the A.S.C. would there be any objection to that? I am sure something could be managed because Todd always gets attached to some unit every holidays without being permanently caught. I go to London Friday and if the weather is decent I shall make my descent by road on Monday. I have made enquiries about a temporary job on a staff of people raised to trace the missing. They make enquiries among the wounded soldiers and that would have been splendid but they have just got enough people. —Till Monday then.

LETTERS FROM TOURS.[1]

GRAND HOTEL, PARIS, Aug. 1, 1915.

We had an excellent crossing on Saturday and I thoroughly enjoyed it, though I was quite glad of my Burberry. I didn't feel the least unwell. It is quite true about the net across the Channel, it is between Dover and Folkestone but I could only see about 10 miles of it.

[1] Dick eventually went to Tours to study French and drive a Red Cross ambulance car.

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It is perfectly visible with large buoys every few hundred yards and small floats in between them and every half mile or so there is a steam mine sweeper stationed at the net with telephones.

I think that it is zig-zag with gaps in between and that there was more of it between us and Calais though out of sight. I hear that up to last week they had caught 42 submarines. The little Red X. man who dashed into the train at the last moment at Victoria was most useful as he goes backwards and forwards to the front every ten days and saved us most of the customs, but there are some awful delays with endless visés etc. which are horrible. We had to stand in the lower deck of the boat at Boulogne to get our passports looked at and we were there 1½ hours in the crowd. If we had had our uniforms we should have been saved that. We left Boulogne 1½ hours late—very slow to Amiens and a shocking pace afterwards: we eat endless meals in the train and that made the time pass and it was quite a nice journey. We passed innumerable troop trains of French soldiers: cattle vans with { '40 hommes' / 8 chevaux } on the outside and there were all the men squashed up inside with only a little straw to lie on. The uniforms of the soldiers are so extraordinary, a good many

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wear the new sky blue uniform, some dark blue coats and scarlet trousers, many khaki of various shades and a great many white and black and brown corduroy trousers and coats with different coloured képis. I think that as long as a képis is worn that seems all that is necessary. The dragoons are wonderful with helmets and breast-plates. I think I must have asked at least two Generals or Colonels at the Nord whether they were porters—they all look the same. The rain came on this afternoon and it was so wet we couldn't see much but we went to Notre Dame. To-morrow we have to go to the War office to get viséd and get tickets for Tours. Boulogne was awfully interesting, every sort of officer, Indians, Red X. and quite like England. It is the only place we passed through which is in the zone of the armies. People seem rather depressed here and think that if Warsaw falls 100,000 Germans will rush our front and the line of communications may be cut, an awful idea but quite likely I am afraid.

TOURS, LE MORTIER, Aug. 1915.

We arrived here last night from Paris, at 1.45 A.M. We went to the Ministre de la Guerre and after endless waiting and signatures we at

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last got to the office of the Croix Rouge where we got our brassards and tickets. It was an awfully tiring journey because besides Charlie and I there were three resplendent French officers in the carriage and so we couldn't lie down at all and the train bumped and shook horribly. We all tried to go to sleep but I was rather anxious lest we should miss the junction of St. Pierre des Corps and so at every station I leapt up and dashed out to find what station it was. Monsieur Brigogne met us at Tours and we drove out about 3 miles in a little fiacre. We drove up a very dark avenue and then up to the house which looked very ghostly, everything shut up.

He unbarred the doors and we entered into a rather gloomy hall with uncarpeted stairs leading out. He took us upstairs and I took the first room we came to and Charlie the next. I went to see where he was lodged and when Monsieur Brigogne opened the door I saw a look of horror come over Charlie's face. A large room only lit with one candle with polished oak floor, huge furniture stuck round the walls and in the distance two enormous canopied beds with curtains caught up over the centre like the state rooms at Windsor! However they are more dilapidated now one can see them

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in day time. My room is smaller and less palatial: it has got a stone floor and funny shuttered windows. There is no bath room which is rather a bore. We had breakfast in bed consisting of a very unsatisfactory meal of coffee which I hate and rolls. We have got quite a nice sitting room so we are rather well off.

The family consists of M. Brigogne aged about 55 with moustache and imperial, his wife quite nice but rather untidy and an old man who I think must be Mons. Brigogne's father most oddly dressed in sabots and a white bow tie and stock, who tells me that he is very fond of chess so I hope he and Charlie will enjoy playing together. None of the family speak English. We have just had *déjeuner* at 12.0. Omelette and coffee and this afternoon we are going to the Hospital.

Many thanks for your letters. I have ordered the *Times* to be sent out so that is all right, it comes the following day. We had a great disappointment on going to the Hospital and found that Madame de Pourtalez had waited for us and now being a slack time there is nothing to do. We have just heard of the fall of Warsaw and I am afraid that may mean there will soon

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be plenty of wounded on our front. Instead I have been assisting with the garden and yesterday working in the harvest. I think I am learning a lot of French and I can always make myself understood though not very gracefully.

It has been too cold to bathe yet, but I shall when it is warmer. The climate here is just about the same as England. Tour is a very nice town and the Loire is beautiful.

Many thanks for yours of this afternoon. I have hardly spoken to Charlie in English at all, but I have hired a velo to-day so that now conversation is impossible! *Déjeuner* is rather fearful. We begin with (to-day's meal) carp caught in the rather muddy little pool, very small and eaten bones and all. (I very nearly broke down when I saw the old man having neatly cleaned his plate begin to suck the head of his fish!!!)

After that we have hare with the same knives and forks then cold meat then vegetables all brought in on pewter plates in enormous quantities, and all eaten with the same knives and forks. They think I starve when I refuse to eat more than 2 meat courses at the same meal but I can't manage such a repast. We then

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have cheese and very excellent fruit washed down with cider and various coloured wines.

Charlie has been awfully trying lately! Just because I happened quite by accident to upset him by putting my stick between his legs when he was retreating from a ferocious dog he says that I am a public danger and he has now hired a bicycle without my knowing and left me to walk, but I have had my own back by discovering a most delightful bathing place in the River Chér which he was unable to find so he was forced to apologise. The Chér is a large river, as big as the Thames a tributary of the Loire which flows on the other side of the town and which is navigable by barges. There is a lock and by the side a weir making up stream a kind of wide almost motionless pool and down stream a most delightful rapid with a great cascade of water rushing under the weir. There are always people bathing there so you needn't be afraid! I have met a very nice French officer who was wounded after 6 months in the trenches acting as interpreter. He bathes every evening and is most agreeable. We undress in the 'Lock Cottage,' where there is a dear old woman who keeps the towels and things. She urges me to take great care and also dry myself well!

Tours is a very fine town, except the suburbs

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which are most insanitary, the sewage all being thrown into the streets.

The evenings here are very nice. We always sit out till 10 P.M. The frogs make rather a noise and also the 'cric-cracs' which I think are a kind of grasshopper. There are some very nice yellow birds flying about, but I don't know their name.

To-day was market day, ½ yearly, great excitement and lots of funerals—*too* awful—plumes and coachmen in three cornered black hats and women all ***swathed*** in black crape. They have made me quite depressed the whole day. I think without exaggeration of the women here have black crepe veils reaching down to their knees. The people don't seem to take much notice of the war I don't think. They seem to have given up all hope of a decisive end. All their relations are serving but they seem rather apathetic. The soldiers themselves look wretched, no fixed uniform except a képis and awfully untidy and slack looking.

Just a line to say we have been sent for to the hospital and went out in the car this morning. It is a 40 h.p. Napier weighing 2 tons—quite new but knocked about. The brakes are quite useless

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and we have to turn off the petrol when going down a steep hill as the only way of controlling the brute. You can imagine that it is not much fun in crowded Tours full of tramways. We have to be at the garage to-morrow at 7.45 to fetch nurses to the Grande Breteche Hospital and at 8.30 we take 16 wounded Tommies on a fishing expedition.

It is very nice now that we have got something to do every day. After *déjeuner* at 6.45 we have to be ready with the car at the Place du Palais de Justice to pick up the *infirmiers*. We go a sort of round collecting them and then go on to Monmortier about 4 kilos. away where the Hospital is, sister to the Grande Bretiche. There are some very nice wounded soldiers and we talk to them for about an hour when we have to wait. We take them on various expeditions etc. and return in time for *déjeuner* at 12.30. In the afternoon we sometimes have a job to do and sometimes bathe. I generally manage to get one bathe in in the day and take soap and wash there. I hope soon there will be more work to do and some longer runs. Sometimes the wounded are sent up to Normandy and it would be great fun having a run like that.

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This pottering about in the town is rather dull and rather dangerous though it is very good for my driving. I have nearly run into a funeral and knocked over a tram. When people begin to explain I just say I can't understand a single word and go on and it saves a lot of trouble. *Everyone* stares at the uniform [Eton volunteer's] and two women looked at Charlie and said ' Qu'est-ce que c'est ce machin là ' and roared with laughter but most of them seem much struck. Many of the people insist on shaking hands with one.

September.

I am waiting for my regular uniform to arrive and then shall start home immediately. I hoped to have been able to see some of the old Chateaux round here but the days are so full and the trains so bad. We went yesterday to Azey le Rideau to see the chateau there, very charming; we then bicycled to Longeaies and as we had 3 hours to wait for the train we had to bicycle home and arrived in a state of nervous break-down after doing more than 50 kilos in heavy uniform on a hot day! The French interpreter has gone off to the front again so now we bathe in solitary state except for some little gamins worse than the English ones and impossible

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to understand. I shall be glad to have an English breakfast again ! !

Hope to arrive Thursday or Friday night at latest.

LETTERS FROM SANDHURST.

R. MILITARY COLLEGE, SANDHURST.
November 1915.

I arrived quite safely at this place of torment yesterday. It is most bitterly cold and there are *no* fires. My servant has temporarily vanished so I am without one for the time. I arrived to find the last person's bed more or less as he left it but to-night someone has deigned to give me some cleaner things. As H Coy is full, I have to sleep in K which is the Cavalry. It's miles from the parade ground and everywhere else so I have to rush round all day. However when the next lot go out I expect I shall be moved. The worst part is that there is nowhere to go in the evenings except one's bedroom which is a most wretched apartment with a deal table, chest of drawers and bed. But I think things will get slightly more comfortable as time goes on. I can get leave from midday to 11 P.M. on most Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays and when I have passed out of recruit drill in about a month, week ends about every 3rd week.

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December 1915.

Col. Warre asked me round after dinner the other night and was most kind and will do anything he can and thinks it will be all right about the 60th. Many people seem to have been shunted to other regts., but there is plenty of time and many people must be killed before my time comes to leave here. The 3rd and 4th Battns. have been moved to the East with many other troops I believe. Of course with conscription anything may happen and it is not impossible we may be taken from here to train the new Armies. To-day I have been over to Farnham to see 'Mother Jack.' We had a bitter change this morning with snow and a freezing wind. My velo had a chill and wouldn't start but went all right when at last she consented to go. I arrived a 'mask of mud' and tried to start home at 3.30 but again she was frozen and only after long efforts and long after dark did I get home after a muddy and bumpy journey but as warm as toast as I was wrapped up to the eyes. Yesterday I went to Eton, unfortunately my front tyre bust and I had to push the machine to Bagshot and buy another. It was Confirmation day at Eton—three years since I was confirmed. Everything was the same only more people are left and killed. The half

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ends on Friday and I shall try to get over if I can as there are several people I want to see before they go.

June 1916.

Many thanks for your letter. I am glad to think I am pretty certain of the 60th. Col. Warre seems to think I ought to have been under officer, though I know he was pleased that I was made senior Sergeant which is the next best thing. At the time I told him I thought the best choice had been made—because Hendy is 4 years older than me and in addition to that has been in the Army since the war started and was in France for a considerable time. I think in many ways I could have run the company as well if not better, but I should have strongly objected if there had been any suggestion of making me senior to him. He is very nice and there would have been no difficulty or friction between us but under the circumstances I can't see that anything else could have been better than the present arrangement which works very smoothly. The date of passing out has now been settled for July 18. I had hoped that it was going to be earlier than that and it will make my course here a full 8 months. I really

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JACINTH WILMOT SITWELL.
Coldstream Guards.

Died of wounds near Ypres
July 9, 1916.

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enjoy it very much, but it's getting a little boring now. The King was to have come down to-day but it has been postponed on account of Lord Kitchener's death. Dreadfully sad, apart from the importance of the calamity for him to meet his end like that alone in the sea.

We have got a new adjutant, late adjutant to the 1st Scots Guards. He is nice but very strict on parade. This Battn. is supposed to be as good as a Battn. of Guards at drill but he seems to think it wants a good deal adding to it!

July 14, 1917.

I was so grieved to hear of Jacinth's death. I know how much you will feel it. But one can only die once and 'Dolce et decorum pro patria mori.'

We had rather a frantic night in the trenches last night and I have been in bed all this afternoon fast asleep as a result. We arrived up them last night in time to cook our evening meal and then worked at the dug-outs till it got dark. We then sent out patrols till the enemy attacked between 1.0 and 2.0 A.M. After that little excitement I tried to get to sleep but the trenches

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are rather small and there is no room to sleep except in the passage way of the communication trench and these were already filled with prostrate bodies. However by degrees I found a sort of nest and with my mackintosh, blanket and overcoat tried to get 40 winks. I was fairly successful but kept waking up to dig a new 'hip bone hole' and before the dawn it got so horribly cold and the dew was so heavy it was no use trying any longer. I thought of going to the sea next week end with Hendy as I want some sea air very much. I haven't been very well last week and was in hospital for 2 or 3 days with a slight attack of pleurisy, but that has gone now. I suppose I caught a cold somehow, but I went up in time and a few hours in bed stopped it. I want to get quite right again before I pass out.

After all we didn't go to Brighton as the weather threatened to be rather depressing and so Hendy and I came to Oxford instead and have had a very delightful week end.

Everyone is extremely hospitable and we had a great night yesterday. First to the Oxford theatre and then a most noisy supper to celebrate I don't quite know what, the

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return of some wounded old 'Magdalenians' I think.

The college is full of men in a cadet battn. who are training for commissions and we had two or three very nice ones to supper, which lasted from 11.0–1.0. After that we made a most dreadful noise till about 2.30 and then tried to collect the various gentlemen rather the worse for the night's entertainment and conduct them to their rooms. One cadet we had great difficulty with. Someone had broken all the lamps in the cloisters and we had to get him back to his room in St. Swithen's (near my old ones) in the pitch dark.

It really was too funny when somebody suddenly struck a match to see about 6 people all trying to get through the wall under the impression they had reached the door.

However at last we got him home and undressed him with some difficulty—the other men in his room were most indignant at being woken up. He told me this morning that he found himself asleep in the middle of the lawn at 4.0 in the morning but wasn't any the worse. This afternoon we have been on the river recovering. I am quite well again now and as long as I don't get a cold I shall be all right.

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July 1916.

Quite an exciting week end we have just been through. A private visit by the King to see us ride! a dreadful ordeal. My horse was straight from a hearse I think and wouldn't *move*. To-day we have had a formal inspection by the King and Staff, Lord French, Queen Mary etc., etc. We hope that we are going to get 4 days' leave as a result of the visit but know nothing yet. I have exchanged my velo for another one, a 'Triumph.' I think I have got the best bargain but the new one is very racy, low handle bars which I dislike but it is more powerful and moves with great rapidity. I went up to London on it yesterday and had a most nerve destroying time through Houndslow and Hammersmith—once really in London it is all right. I dined with a Sandhurst friend at his home near Watford and then home after dinner, a very long and tiring day over 100 miles. All went well except a little accident in the Edgware Road on the wet tram lines but that was my own fault and I shall know better next time. We pass out on the 18th and I hope to get a few days' leave.

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DICK, aged 19.
King's Royal Rifle Corps.

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Telegram

Monday, July 16.

Have got 60th. Gazetted next Wednesday morning. Have written for leave.

Telegram

Tuesday night, July 17.

Will come and call for you to-morrow 10 days' leave!

LETTERS FROM SHEERNESS.

6TH BATT. K.R.R.C., SHEERNESS.
July 1916.

I arrived yesterday at the Grosvenor and waited an hour for Ackers[1] who never turned up and then went to the station which was a perfect pandemonium worse than I ever remember it, only to find the train I was told to come down by was cancelled and I had to wait about for two hours cursing my luck that I had had to leave home in such a rush for nothing. The adjutant was very civil and on my arrival showed me to my room where I found Ackers who had arrived by some train of his own.

The room is very small for two and there is

[1] 1st Batt. K.R.R.C.

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no furniture of *any* sort provided but I am going to try and hire a chest of drawers. The sanitary arrangements are nil, no water or baths or anything. A little water is boiled from the sea I should think and that has to do for all washing in one of these funny little canvas washing bowls. Apparently letters from here are opened and censored so I don't quite know what I may say. We are about a mile and a half from the Thames Estuary where it joins the Medway where I believe there is some bathing. One is not allowed to leave the Island without special leave and it is the most depressing place you have ever seen—thousands of troops, no trees at all and flat except for some little mounds in the middle.

Sheerness is quite a big port I should say from what I can see of it in the distance and there seem to be some men of war in the river but it is too hot to walk far so one stays in these huts which are like perfect furnaces—not a bit of shade anywhere. They have sent out some enormous drafts lately and from what I hear we shan't be kept here very long. I understand we are on active service here, something to do with coast defences and get extra pay I think and I suppose one gets a G.S. medal if the war was to end before one got out.

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Since I wrote on Sunday I am a little wiser how this Battn. is run though I am still rather 'moidered.' There are 8 companies of varying strength instead of the 4 usual in a service Regt. The Battn. varies in strength from 2000–2700 men, average about 2300 which is huge. I was only on the square two hours doing rifle drill and was then posted to No. 1 Coy. The work is very much harder than any other company as one does field training, marches, open order etc. etc. with the partially trained men while in every other company excluding 1 and 3 one simply watches recruits on the square but that teaches you nothing and is terribly dull. On my first parade I found myself company commander as the other officers were on leave!

I am afraid I shan't be allowed away for any courses as they are so short of officers and nearly all the subalterns are too young to go out yet so that I am rather a rare possession being just 19, and I think I shan't be long here. I may have to take a draft out to France or Salonica which I should like. This afternoon the whole Battn. (over 2000 men) all marched 2 miles to the sea and bathed off about 30 yards of shore. I never saw anything so funny, the sea became absolutely solid.

There is a reserve squadron of battle ships

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in the Estuary and when bathing one sees all the traffic going up the Thames pass which is interesting, otherwise the island is perfectly accursed and the heat is awful.

Just woken after sleeping all this Sunday afternoon in the mess. We had a very trying day yesterday. I took over orderly officer for a fellow who wanted to go on week end leave, and bitterly repented it before the day was over. I was on parade at 6.15 A.M. after an uncomfortable night under the telephone in the orderly room and I ruined my Saturday afternoon having various parades, guards etc. and at 9.45 P.M. we all had to turn out for aircraft action. We stayed on parade from 9.45 till 3.45 this morning so my day was from 6.15 A.M. to 3.45 A.M. which wasn't bad and I had to be up at 8.0 again this morning. We sat on the steps of the company orderly room getting colder and sleepier and having meals of gingerbreads and sloe gin through the night. I never was so bored in my life—at 1.0 A.M. this Sunday morning I was watching the flashes of the guns firing at two Zeppelins, N. of Gravesend from here and saw the Zepp. catch fire beautifully as funnily enough I was just watching that very piece of the sky. There was first of all a glowing spark in the sky and then it got larger and larger still falling and at last it became a great blazing mass but floating

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down quite slowly. Before it got to the ground it practically died out only the glowing part showing but we could see the sky light up when the Zepp bumped on the ground. Soon after there was another curious light further down the Thames which might have been an airship burning on the ground. The Brigade office telephoned here that 2 Zepps had been brought down so I hope it is true. It was an extraordinary sight watching the flames start out of nowhere in the sky and then gradually spread. All the men cheered and then there were scenes of great excitement and joy—but what a death! I couldn't help thinking of the wretched men inside as the envelope became more and more in flames. I don't know how far off she was, but some considerable distance.

General Davies's offer to take me as his A.D.C. is extremely kind and I feel very much flattered. I think as you say, it is very doubtful if the W.O. would let me go (to say nothing of the C.O. here), even at his request. In addition to that I think it would be a mistake to take on a job like that so soon after I have joined. I don't want to be kept back from going to the front and if I made it plain that I must go to the front when the time came that I should have

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gone from here, I should find myself in a Battn. where I knew no one. I am sure you would wish me to do that and not trade on that position to get out of going abroad and I think it probable that it will be a very short time before I go out with a draft. 6 of our officers go out on Monday. There are constant Zeppelin raids and the nights become a perfect nuisance. As orderly officer yesterday I was on parade at 6.30 A.M. and didn't finish doing the rounds of the guard which are scattered about the Island till 20 mins. past midnight and at 1.20 this morning the camp was roused for a raid and we had to stand to till 3.15 A.M. so you can imagine I am pretty tired this morning and this awful heat is intolerable. You have no *idea* what the camp gets like.

I went to see Mr. Bennet yesterday and sat to him for an hour, and am going again this morning. I think it would be a very good thing if he could come down to the Hall for a night and then he could see where he would like the picture to go. He did a most excellent pencil drawing of the photograph you sent him and I think it will be a charming picture.

I am now doing bombing and revolver courses and on the 22nd I go to Hythe for a month

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which I am looking forward to, as I am getting very tired of Sheppey. I get every week end off at Hythe so perhaps you could come down to Folkestone for a breath of sea air one week end. Hendy is up here to-day and we are going over to Sandhurst for the afternoon—'H' Coy. has done very well and won all the sports etc. and is now champion company at arms which is rather nice.

I went to Sandhurst last Sunday and fetched my bicycle back from Windsor and left it with a friend at Sandhurst where I know it is safe. It was awfully nice to go back. Everyone was charming and Groves Raynes was delighted to see me again. I told you how well 'H' Coy. had done and he was kind enough to say that the improvement started from the time we were made N.C.O.'s and since that time there had hardly been any crime at all. I am orderly officer to-day and was on parade at 6.30 this morning and have to visit the Guards at midnight this evening: I have gone to the extravagance of a taxi as I feel too tired to walk two miles there besides that we are specially on the alert for reasons you will hear later if anything has happened and so I am afraid there is not much sleep for us to-night. I saw the Colonel

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to-day who says I shall be warned for the 19th and after that I may go out any day.

I have just heard from Hythe that I got a first class which I am very pleased about as there were an exceptional number of 2nds etc. given and the standard was higher than usual.

October 12.

I go on a bombing course to-morrow and will let you know my address when I get there.

GODSTONE.

I hope you have had my note giving you this address: I shall be here about a fortnight. This is going to be 'some' course. We take our lunch out with us as it is too far to get back at midday and we eat our sandwiches like road-menders, at the side of the road. We only have ½ hour break for luncheon between 8.15 A.M. and 4 P.M. and then all the notes to write up and all the bombs to draw and I foresee we are going to have a busy time.

Yesterday we had a day full of frightfulness blowing up mines and craters and all sorts of things: a horrid row! We *live* in the trenches

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and wear overalls on account of the awful mud. I only hope it will be fairly fine whilst we are down here. I don't know when I shall have a chance of getting home again, perhaps when this course is over.

I am up in London for the night. I thought I should have 24 hours ' sans bombs ' up here but I dreamt about them all night and then slept most of the morning and didn't wake till 11.0 !

You needn't be worried about my fingers being blown off as we have thrown all the live stuff we are going to. That's the best part of the whole thing. The trench fights are rather amusing but very exhausting—we have dummy bombs and two squads attack each other in the trenches. We wear overalls but get filthy now the weather is wet and the trenches are full of water. I particularly want to do well if possible and get a certificate as Brigade instructor, though that perhaps will be too much for me. I am all right for my *certificate* so far, if only I can last out this awful course but I ought to have got a day or two's leave as I am absolutely tired out. Well cheer oh !

I have just heard that I only got a certificate as Regimental instructor at Godstone. What I

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wanted was a Brigade instructorship but I missed it by one mark in the final exam ! ! I was stupid and did too much work and got ' muzzy.' I enclose a letter which I have just got from Jock Davidson[1] the assistant instructor to my squad. Very trying to have missed my brigade certificate, however a regimental is quite good. Our day at Godstone was 9.0–4.0 in the wet trenches, only ½ hour break for lunch, and then we used to work at our notes and drawings till between 12 and 1.0 with just a break for tea and dinner. Added to that the weather was wretched, wet and cold and the bombing ground 2½ miles from our billet and I think you will agree we had about enough.

[Enclos.]

I am awfully sorry about the result of the exam. but as you only got 7 for bombs the Commandant wouldn't hear of giving you a ' Brigade.' I was awfully disappointed and so was D—— as he wanted to get you back as an instructor as you will see from your report. I am afraid it was partly I that was responsible for your staleness as I stuffed you with bombs too much. I hope you won't get strafed too much as you really did awfully well.

[1] Rifle Brigade. Missing.

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No news when we go and we may be here for weeks or go at a moment's notice. We have an enormous crowd of officers here and 21 subalterns are warned for the front so I hope when we do go we shall all go together. Most lovely day, but quite cold. I enjoyed my week at home very much—if I have a chance I will come home for a night but otherwise I don't think it is very much use your coming up to town if I am only going through. Let me know what you think about it but it would probably be an awful rush—anyhow let me know what you think.

December 3, 1916.

The first 10 on the list sail for France tomorrow Monday, and I am next to go. I was very disappointed not to have gone with them as these were old hands and there were some exceptionally nice fellows amongst them.

No news of when we go. I am up for the week-end for a farewell dinner etc. with the fellows going out and we have had a very nice time. I fetched Dyonèse out to-day and we had tea etc. and I think she enjoyed it very much. I go back to Sheerness by the 10.5, arriving 12.10 midnight!! Just off to dinner—am pretty certain to get 2 or 3 days before

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actually sailing so will probably come straight home and then you can come up here with me. Well good night.

Last Letter from Sheerness.

December 10, 1916.

I have just got back from London where I have been for the week end. I hadn't intended to go away but on Saturday morning the adjutant sent me a message saying that if I wanted to go away I could so of course I did. Anyhow if you will be in town next week end I will try to get up from Friday afternoon to Sunday if I am still here.

I went to lunch with Aunt Car and then went to the Oratory with her and met Father Talbot who was quite charming. We have got no men left at all here as the W.O. have had every single available man, N.C.O. etc. sent away on draft leave ready to sail on Friday, so they have a great crowd of officers and I think I shall probably get away next week end. I wish you would try and find two *small* photographs of you both that I could take out with me and if you can will you make me a little washleather or cloth bag to hold the little cross Aunt Car gave me and the identification disc you gave me so that they won't rattle.

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My Company Commander Smith has just gone on final leave. He was out 14 months with the 1st Batt. and I hope that we shall go out together. He is so very nice and I should like to get out to the same Battn. as he would help me on.

I have been 2nd in command of his company just lately with 10 subalterns though they are always changing and he has promised to get me in his company in France if it can be arranged. Well, I will let you know immediately I hear anything about next week-end.

Telegram.

QUEENSBOROUGH, Dec, 12, 12.10.

Sailing Wednesday will both of you meet me Grosvenor Hotel as soon as you can this evening.

LETTERS FROM FRANCE.

To his Father.

'SS. CONNAUGHT,' SOUTHAMPTON WATER.
4 P.M., Dec. 13, 1916.

Very many thanks for your letter. Yes, I was dreadfully disappointed about not getting next week end. The wretched part was that the Brigade knew since the 8th that we were

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to go and never took the trouble to send down to Bks. till midday yesterday otherwise I should have got home. Mo was splendid and got everything beautifully packed before I started.

This is a cross channel boat to Ireland transformed into a troopship, very wretched but I have got one of the best berths. We have 91 officers on board and about 20 berths with 2 good ones which the steward looks after and I have got one of them! I shall write as often as I can and shall probably be at the Base some weeks. *Please* don't get worried and write often.

To his Mother.

'SS. CONNAUGHT,' SOUTHAMPTON WATER.
4.0 P.M., Dec. 13, 1916.

I arrived an hour before anyone else in spite of having left an hour later and in addition had an excellent lunch en route. I find there are two comfortable cabins and I have booked one of them for myself with my usual luck so I have started well. This is an Irish Channel Pacquet boat transformed into a troopship very small and dirty. We leave this evening at 8 P.M. and disembark to-morrow morning. I will try and write every day and you must write too because letters mean a great deal when one is away.

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I hope you explained to Dyonèse about my not coming to see her but I really couldn't stand any more partings. It *was* a good thing you came up otherwise my luggage would have been in a dreadful state. The sun is setting over the water and looks beautiful. May it be a good omen. Please don't worry about me: I am sure I shall return safely and it will make me *wretched* if I think you are worrying so for my sake don't. Well good-night.

No. 1 Infantry Base Depôt, B.E.F.
December 14.

We had a splendid crossing leaving soon after 7.30 and disembarking at 7 A.M.

As I told you I got the only comfortable cabin and had a very good night and never felt the pitching at all. We are in tents here and I am afraid it will be very cold otherwise it is nice. I have met everyone who went out last time and feel quite at home. The mess is very comfortable and quite warm. This afternoon we are going down to Havre by train about 5 miles as there are one or two things I want to get, something for Xmas for Gregory and 'Mother Jack.' This will be my address till I go up the line and when that happens no one knows.

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My Battn. will probably be in orders this evening and directly I know I will let you know.

We had breakfast at Havre this morning in a café called 'Fontina' which was most welcome as it was very cold early. There are some awfully nice fellows here and everything is quite cheerful. Jock Davison my friend in the Rifle Brigade is coming to dine this evening. He hasn't gone up yet and I am very pleased to have the chance of seeing him again. All the work I have done so far is to censor letters but to-morrow we have a week's course—bombing etc. but as I have done it all before I hope I shall not have much to do. The post is *just* going and I will write again for the next. Write here when you have time.

Cheer ho—in haste.

HARFLEUR, Sunday, 17/12/1916.

A fellow has just arrived from Sheerness with a draft and is returning to England to-night with this. I am to join the 1st Battn. [near Abbeville] and they are supposed to be resting till Jan. 12. I hear they *have* stopped all leave. It is an absolute shame but we get it from here so I can't grumble. Really what with 'meatless' days and things I think this

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is the best place. Terrific frost to-night and this camp on the hillside is terribly cold. This will be posted in England and when I have any more opportunity of sending back letters, I will.

No. 1 I.B.D., B.E.F., Dec. 16. 1916.

As this is Saturday and there is nothing much to be done I have come down into the town and can write from the Club here which is quite comfortable. I told you I had been posted to the 1st Battn., at least that hasn't been contradicted yet. I hear they are resting till the middle of January but can't vouch for the truth of it. I am very grateful indeed for the splendid packing, my bed was quite ready to get into and I slept very well in spite of the fact that I was on the boards and the cold was awful. The huts are made of canvas a little better than tents I think, but frigid to say the least of it. They put us through a week's general course here, very stupid indeed just the very earliest things we did at Sandhurst.

We have to walk about 2 miles up an *awful* hill to the school up a sort of ladder and on top there is a great sort of plateau with camps on it. Ackers and I are going to the 1st together and now two more fellows arrived from Sheerness.

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Eley and Hext both Etonians are coming so that is rather nice. I am beginning to realise what misery the rain means. You have no idea what the mud gets like and of course it is nothing here to what it must be up the line. This isn't half a bad town and quite a nice change from Sheerness—rather like Tours only not so fine. Don't forget to send me 100 Petit Format and 2 ½ lb. tins of tobacco. I shall never sleep in anything but my blankety pyjamas again! They are simply splendid.

The 'Connaught' was crammed coming over with the men lying all along the galley ways and on the deck and I believe except O.C. ship and the adjutant, D—— and I were the only two who had a comfortable night.

Will you sew this paper * on the chair in my room before I forget it. Tell me how the orangery is getting on and write soon. I wish I could tell you more about my probable movements but names mustn't be mentioned and I suppose it is very wise. As a matter of fact I know nothing myself.

I.B.D., B.E.F., Dec. 18, 1916.

I have just realised that I have probably missed the Christmas mail. I hope this will be in time to wish you a happy Noel but I am

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afraid it won't. The posts go at such awful times 1.30 P.M. and we only have a short time in the middle of the day and in the evening it is too cold to do anything but go to bed. I hope I shall get up the line soon because really I think it will be warmer except just being in the trenches.

These awful canvas huts are so cold—in the morning they would stand without the tent posts I think they are frozen so hard and the sponges etc. are stiff. I had hoped to have heard from someone by now, but haven't had a letter. Do try and write as often as you can and get anyone else to. Letters make such a lot of difference and even though you think they are dull they aren't really.

I shall think of you all at dinner time and drink your health. I may be here but I hope not. Everyone stays here for just a day or two and it is rather wretched and I should like to be with my Battn. but probably I shall spend it in the train. It takes an interminable time to travel anywhere.

I have been censoring the men's letters this morning. They write home for Christmas and they all say they prefer this to Sheppey. I wonder if you will have the choir at the Hall this year. Do you remember how they used to come to the dining-room in Granny's time. I think we must revive that after the war. Well, I am

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feeling *very* well and don't worry about me. Wish every one in the village a happy Noel from me and bless you all.

To his Mother.

No. 1 I.B.D., B.E.F., Dec. 20, 1916.

Many thanks for your letters. I am glad you got back all right after you saw me off at Waterloo. I felt rather worried on the way down and thought there ought to have been someone with you. However it seemed as though I wasn't really going away at all. It is so funny to think how calmly one takes things. After the war one would think that going to the war would be a great sort of event and in reality it wasn't anything. I am still here and am rather anxious to get away. It is better than Sheerness here but rather too much like it. Very pretty country indeed and the view from the top of the hill is marvellous. The Seine valley on the right with meadows on either side of the river and in front and below are enormous valleys with the opposite side heavily wooded with chateaux in the trees. The bottom of the valley full of tents and huts and behind the sea.

All morning I have been censoring letters. Some of them are very pathetic but they all

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seem quite cheerful. This evening I payed out my Battn. By the way I am in command of reinforcements going up to the 2nd Battn. All the money is in notes beastly local things for Havre only from 50 cent. upwards. There isn't any metal coinage left now in France I believe and every town has its own paper money down to 25 centimes.

Ackers has gone up the line to-night to the 1st only he is taking a draft to another Division first so that I shall probably reach the Battn. before he does as I think I shall go up soon. After this you had better write to the 1st Batt. and not here. The Christmas posts are all anyhow and it takes ages for letters to come up. I have got to get up early to-morrow—so to bed. Write often.

I.B.D., Christmas Eve, 1916.

I go up the line to-night which is rather wretched but it can't be helped. I had hoped to have my Christmas either here or with the 1st, but I shall spend it travelling. With any luck I shall be most of Christmas day in Rouen as I leave here after dinner this evening and shall take all night getting to Rouen in a horrid french troop train and then go on again to-morrow

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evening I suppose. I shall be in rest for some time I imagine but write to the 1st.

A most heavenly day but not very 'seasonable' as they say. By the way I have got my Balaclava helmet as well as one I bought here and 2 Cynthia made for me so I shan't want any more for myself.

I am delighted about Dyonèse winning the gold medal for French—of course I think it is marvellous—family brains coming out at last!

To his Mother.

Christmas Eve, 4 P.M. By bearer to London.

Just off up the line via Rouen. Very bad luck having to travel this night of all nights, especially as I am to take a draft of gunners up men whom I don't know and I expect they will give me a pretty lively time.

I wrote this morning but this may arrive first.

IN THE TRAIN, Christmas Day, 1916.

You will have got my letter yesterday just as I was leaving the base.

Well, as I said, I had to take a draft, not of my own regiment, and they couldn't march at all. We fell in at 4.30 P.M. The column of which my party was only a small unit stretched

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nearly a mile. That march was a nightmare—about 6 kilometres we took over 4 hours all through the suburbs of Havre full of Christmas shoppers, trams coming through the ranks and the men all the time shouting to their friends on the pavements singing and cheering generally in a mad way. However we arrived *à la gare* a sort of goods depôt. 'No the train not ready yet—we will make it up soon. Restez-vous ici.' My thoughts of dinner faded away. We were 3½ hours before we started. The train—well I have never seen anything like it, except one, and that is the one I am in now. It had 50 coaches ranging from passenger coaches of the oldest type to new wagon couloirs and down to cattle trucks, chiefly the latter. We got the men in and *waited*. I was next the engine and talked with the engine driver for a long time and made great friends with him. He came from Tours. It was well into Christmas Day before the guard blew his horn and *en avant*. I suppose we averaged ten miles an hour. En route I was woken up ceaselessly by the piercing shriek of the engine, a peculiar sort of whistle. When we did disembark I handed the men over to the N.C.O. and went with everyone else to have a late breakfast at the Hotel d'Angleterre.

The town we got to was most *charming*. The Seine runs through it and it is very old-

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fashioned and beautiful. After breakfast and a wash I felt a bit less like a cinder and bought a few things I wanted, sent a telegram and a post card to —— and went to a famous hotel to order our Christmas dinner. So far it has been far from being like Christmas. At one we sat down to lunch. *Some* lunch—I have never had so excellent a meal in my life. Eggs, asparagus etc. and canard Rouennaise. They cut the duck's flesh off then squeeze the bones in a kind of press, add port wine and various things till the juice comes out and orange salad etc. It was splendid and I enclose the menu which I want you to keep for me as a souvenir of Noel 1916.

Grand Hotel de la Poste
Rouen

Hors d'œuvre variés
Oeufs poches grand Duc
Caneton rouennais à la presse
Salade d'oranges
Plum pudding aux feux follets
Corbeille de fruits
Corona Corona
Mussigny 1904.

Lunchéon Souvenir de notre départ au front.
Noel 1916.

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H. D. Duncan, 60th Rifles.
J. G. Broadbent, 9/60th Rifles.
W. R. Carrick, Household Battn.
R. B. L., 1/60th Rifles.

Afterwards we went to the Cathedral. The English Church only had morning and evening service so unfortunately we missed them. I should very much have liked to have gone to the early service but we arrived too late and left too early for the evening one. The town was most interesting.

In the square where Joan of Arc was burnt the English soldiers were walking with the French and there were Highlanders, Indians, French troops from the Congo and Indo Chine all in their different uniforms and it made everything quite interesting.

We had some early tea at the Canteen at the station run by Lady Mabel Egerton. The ladies are perfectly splendid and do everything they can.

This train is even longer than the other and only moves at a walking pace. We are only two in the compartment so we should have a fair night but the occupant of the next compartment has just come in via the footboard to have dinner with us—Bully beef, dog biscuit and whiskey.

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It seems so funny to get into a train and have no idea where it is going or what time it arrives. I hand over my draft and then make my way to my battn. which may be days' journey away.

Well I suppose you are just sitting down to dinner—Cold turkey and p.p. ? I like to think of a festive gathering in the dining room but I daresay it really is the housekeeper's room in these rotten times. Never mind, after the war if we aren't all broke we will do better.

This certainly hasn't been an ideal Christmas but it is one I shall never forget and shall laugh about afterwards. That lunch just saved us.

This carriage doesn't sport a light so I have a candle stuck on a box by my side. It is getting rather low and I think 8 o'ck is nearly time for bed as I don't know when I have to detrain. I have bought my draft some cakes each, 10 fr. worth, to cheer them up, poor devils—they are not very happy in their luxurious wagon labelled ' 40 hommes 8 chevaux en long.' When the train stops which it does every 1000 yards the men get out and get water from the engine to make tea. I am always afraid they will get left behind but they can always catch the train up so I suppose it is all right.

My cough has quite gone and I am feeling very fit but at present have rather a headache

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and the train won't improve it. It is rather like 'The Rough Road to Dublin' at the Exhibition as the coaches are so short they jump about. Night night and excuse scrawl.

To his Father.

December 27, evening.

My last letter was written in the train and was only posted last night. Well we got to A—— at dawn on the 26th and I was told to take my draft on to St. R. a little station not far away. We arrived at about 9 A.M. and hopped out. I went to the Railway Transport Officer and was told he was at breakfast but a L/C said I had got out at the wrong station and must get in again. I screamed to my sergeant-major to get the men in again and he shouted they were all right just as the train began to move but my fat valise was left out! I and the sergeant-major snatched hold of it and jumped on the footboard. We were nearly knocked off by the bridge but after about 2 miles we managed to get into a carriage. At the next station we got out and then the R.T.O. said 'Oh you are quite wrong to have come here, but never mind.' My fat sergeant rolls up and says we have left 8 men behind at the last

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station. I ask the R.T.O. where I have to take my men, he doesn't know but thinks to ——. I telephone to H.Q. and they say —— 15 kilos off! I sent my sergeant back by lorry to the last station and tell him to meet me at —— and he starts off. After 4 kilos the men with me not being infantry, heavily laden and after a long journey can't march and get crocked. I am in despair. We arrive at a village —— and find that it is the Headquarters of a Brigade that happens to be mine. I go to apply for a waggon to continue our journey in. H.Q. invite me to lunch and give me a very good feed. Not till 4.30 did the waggon arrive and again we start in the pouring rain and dark. We reach F. at 6.30. I meet my sergeant and the 8 men and hand over the draft. The gunners were *most* hospitable gave me dinner and arranged me to a billet *chez le maire.* After dinner we go in search of it and at last find it. Madame shows me to a garret but a bed! She explains that her house is rather cheerless as it was till lately a barrack of gendarmerie! This morning the mayor wakes me up by singing and I have breakfast at the mess and they give me their Maltese cart to go back to the station where my luggage was and then on to my Battn. The cart was the usual springless affair with 2 mules

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and after 6 hours' awful travelling I at length with great difficulty find the Battn.

We are in a filthy village but very peaceful. I have a billet in a sort of farm with an enormous manure heap outside. My host and hostess are much like the old Richardsons and the house reminds me of their cottage. I have got a huge feather bed and with my 'flea bag' I shall be quite comfortable. I don't know if I shall be able to keep a diary but keep these letters and when I get back I shall probably remember what the places refer to and I can write up a diary. It has taken me *exactly* to the hour, 3 days and nights to reach the Battn. from the Base. Some Christmas week! We are here indefinitely.

1ST BATT. K.R.R.C., December 28.

We are in this beastly village for some time so you will feel quite easy about me. I am appointed to B Coy. and have got No. 8 platoon. The coy. commander is only temporary as the real commander was killed just before I arrived by a premature bomb.

He had been out 19 months and I believe was charming, awful bad luck as the man who was actually holding the grenade only had his fingers

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blown off. It is so *very* rarely that accidents happen now-a-days with bombs. I think I shall be very happy in this Battn. I don't know if you have ever been in this part of France, it is the most desolate poverty stricken place I have ever been in. The houses are hovels built of mud, no bricks at all and they are mostly thatched. No shops and only a few very poor little estaminets. The inhabitants are filthy no sanitation at all and the whole place stinks. I suppose the soil is bad as the people seem to grow prematurely old with their poverty, withered and despondent at 30. They are more or less hostile to our troops though that isn't the case in most places. I get on very well with my old people though they don't put themselves out to make one comfortable. I only have a biscuit tin to wash in and get even enough warm water to shave with. We do ourselves extremely well in the mess. I suppose the Colonel sees after that—sherry before soup, port, liqueurs, coffee etc. I find that I can speak French considerably better than most people and it has been very useful indeed. I don't know how I should have got on without it in the course of my wanderings. Let me know how the orangery is getting on and I hope the heating will be a success. I could do with a little myself. Will you get them to

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send me out a black tie. Most people wear them in the Battn. Well, I am afraid this is a very dull letter but there isn't much doing except freezing.

December 29, 1916.

No signs of any parcels and I haven't had many letters. Probably delayed by Noel or at Havre. I took a working party to-day to a village near by to build wire beds in the billets there, though charity begins at home and we have none. The R.E.'s look after these jobs and after I had handed over my men I went into their mess and they gave me breakfast and afterwards luncheon. That is the best part of being out here, everyone is so very hospitable. Their village was a little cleaner than ours but pretty awful. Some of the men were put to mend the houses. They plat sticks together and join them into the holes in the walls and then daub mud on them. That is all the walls are built of except the supports for the roof of course. The interpreter told me this province of Picardy was one of the poorest in France. In the farm there I saw a thrashing machine worked by a horse on a kind of treadmill which I have never seen before and also an extraordinary thing.

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There was a pole from the roof to the floor in the kitchen and on it a revolving arm at right angles about 2 feet from the floor with a wooden loop at the end. Through this loop they had put a tiny child and its arms rested on the wood. It ran about but only in a circle of course and it had made a round track on the floor like the goat does. It amused me very much. Very bad for it at such a young age I should think but all the women were out working and there was no one to care for it. I only hope Smith is coming out to this Battn. He will be my company commander if he does and will make an ideal one. It is raining again and the trenches will be awful, especially where we are sure to go, but they issue us with thigh boots I think. I shall ride over to the S. Staffs. to see if Lancaster is still in the land of the living. They are somewhere near I believe. Of course travel is absolutely medieval. There is no way of getting about unless you ride on a pack horse or walk or get a lift on an A.S.C. lorry and one can't venture far from home. I believe there is some anti-vermin stuff to make vests with. If you can will you send me one out once a week to wear next my skin under the warm one because I am afraid the thick ones will get lousy in these dirty billets.

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December 30, 1916.

'I hope this finds you as it leaves me, in the pink!' A letter arrived to-day dated 22nd but everything has been hopelessly entangled by the Christmas posts. Yes—do send me out anything you can, cakes if they will keep, and cooked game, sardines, apples etc. anything that will stand the journey.

The mess here is very good, but chiefly because we are near —— and when we go into the line it will be useful to have things to contribute to the company mess. I wish you would find a little picture of the Hall to send me. We had an inspection by the Divisional General this morning. They are issuing us with a new kind of gas helmet which they say is much better—it's much heavier and I don't care about it at all. It has a clip over the nose amongst other disagreeable things. I am getting my washing done by mine hostesses sister who lives next door. She says she makes ladies' bonnets and irons them, but she will probably infect my things with fleas all the same. I see we have taken over more line from the French —probably we shall go there I should think. The trenches are sure to be awful after the French—so dirty.

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DIVISIONAL GAS SCHOOL, New Year's Day, 1917.

I was detailed yesterday to come over to go a 3 days course at this village—so I mounted my steed and set out. I went rather out of my way to call on Lancaster of the S. Staffs. who I found with some difficulty. He gave me lunch and we had a great talk about old times and it was very nice to see him again. He was looking very unwell and has had 3 bouts of trench fever. After lunch I rode on here. Well this is the most d—— awful place anyone ever saw. I have got a nice billet with a very civil old woman (Madame Magnier) looking after me and my servant came with me so I am all right there, but the mess is awful. As the course only lasts 3 days no one is permanent and of course there is no one to run anything. We have a room in a farm house which takes the bun for dirt, its court yard is 3″ deep in liquid manure and the three farm hands are all dotty village idiots. The farmer and his wife are I think dotty too, but there is a daughter who is very much all there. She is known locally as 'Marie Thérèse' and has considerable fame in the district. The officers take their buns also. One man was in the foreign Legion and is the biggest ruffian I have seen for a long time. At present he is playing poker in the kitchen with M. T. We

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are quite close to [Crécy] where Edward III won his famous victory against the French and if the rain will ever stop I shall ride over to the battlefield to see it. The 71st H.L.I. are stationed here. Last night, New Year's Eve, which is Christmas and everything else combined to the Scotch they made Hell here. They marched up and down playing bagpipes and drums long after midnight and I think the whole Battn. was drunk. We sat up till 12 in our wretched barn listening to the foreign legionaries stories which he invented with the greatest consistency and greeted 1917 as well as we could with local champagne.—Well I suppose it will be the most important year in most of our lives that we shall ever have.

You would have laughed to have seen me before dinner last night sitting in the kitchen of my billet celebrating the son of the house's return from the front. The whole family was there, 3 generations, 2 H.L.I. officers who are in the same billet, and myself. We all, about 14 of us, solemnly sat round a little round table drinking their red wine and cassie having a very 'pleasant' evening. What I can't make out now is how we kept the ball rolling for an hour especially as the two Scotchmen talked with such a brogue that I could with difficulty under-

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stand them and they could only speak a very little French. However it all went off all right. I return to the Battn. Wednesday evening and shall be very glad to get back, because this is a shocking place.

An old doctor was dining with us last night and after dinner we were so bored with everything that we went for a walk in the pouring rain. We then found out we were both Etonians and made quite friends though he was old enough to be my father. He was most amusing and gave me fatherly advice about avoiding Marie Thérèse quite unnecessary as he would have known had he known me ! ! Well I must stop as I am going to try and get a little water out of my hostess. If I am lucky to get it it will be my first bath for 10 days ! !

P.S.—On reading this letter over it seems rather grumbly but don't think it is because I am feeling quite cheerful really in spite of everything which I think is rather extraordinary.

January 2.

Your letters of the 26th and 27th were brought over to me this morning by my servant. The course finishes here to-morrow and I return then

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I hope. All I have learnt is about the new helmet we are shortly having issued and I think it is more uncomfortable than the old one, because it has a clip on the nose and a mouth-piece like a baby's bottle and makes one slobber dreadfully. The others used to cause a dreadful choking sensation, but they are all vile things to wear for any time. I imagine we shall be moving the beginning of next week but we shan't start taking our turn in the line for some time, another fortnight or so. The wet and mud is awful and where we are going to there are no trenches only shell holes. I don't think we shall have much of a time.

January 5, 1917.

I got back from the gas course last night. I rode back in the evening a most lovely moonlight night and had a lovely ride. I went round by a chapel called the Chapelle aux 300 corps, where 300 French knights killed at Crécy were buried. Whilst I was there two French cavalrymen rode slowly up out of the dark. They wore long cloaks with steel helmets which shone in the moonlight and I really thought how very mediæval they were. They might have been at the battle itself. However they said good evening and passed on their way.

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I went to Crécy the other afternoon in an ambulance meaning to go to —— to buy some things. The train was two hours late and I was so fed up I thought I would return home hoping to get a lift in a lorry but couldn't and had to walk I don't know how many miles in the pouring rain. Madame Magnier was most kind and gave me hot coffee and cognac because she thought I should catch cold. She was extremely civil and a dear old thing.

There was a practical attack to-day which the whole Division had to watch, it was rather like a garden party and one saw all sorts of people. Lancaster was there in great form. I had a nice letter from Windram to-day also a book which I think will be nice. Very badly off for pencils, you might send me some.

January 6, 1917.

Just come in from a long day practising a brigade stunt to be done in the future and am rather tired. I am quite settled down now and like this Battn. very much indeed. We are going to a part of the line where food is difficult to get so send me out something will you. Cakes are nice if they will keep. I am afraid we shan't have much of a time as we can't use braziers

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there and can't cook hot stuff and also can't move about during the day. Glad to hear it is warmer in 'Blighty.'

Sunday, January 7, 1917.

I have just been detailed to proceed up the line to take over some clothing stores or something. It is all very indefinite and I am rather mad at being sent. I suppose it entails another of those awful journeys. I have no idea how long I shall be in charge there or anything, but write to the usual address unless I counteract it. Just time to start so I must stop.

January 8.

Field Post-card.

January 8, evening.

You will have got my note sent off on Sunday just as I was leaving the Battn. at —— to come up with men for a gum boot store behind the trenches. Well I have arrived and it is 'Some place' as the Yankees say. [This sentence 'it is some place' was arranged before he left to make it known if he were sent to the Somme front.]

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To start at the beginning. We reached —— where we were to entrain 1 P.M. on Sunday and waited there. I had 7 men to take up and suddenly a Captain came up to me and asked if I belonged to the —st Brigade and I said yes. Well he said, there are 30 men here somewhere to go up with you to gum boot stores and soup kitchens. After some time I collected them— no N.C.O.'s and all different regiments. After waiting indefinitely the train arrived and we got to [Amiens] by various changes and after an awful journey. There were supposed to be some transports to meet us but they weren't there. It was very late and dark and pouring with rain so I pushed the men into a rest camp and tried to find somewhere to go myself, but the officer's rest hut was full and there wasn't a billet to be had in the town.

I was famished and couldn't find anywhere in the town to buy anything to eat as everywhere was shut but at last I got into a café and had an omelette and some wine. There were some French officers there and afterwards Madame and Mademoiselle came in with a cake and some liqueur. It was apparently some festival commemorating the arrival of the wise men in Bethlehem (12th night) and there is an old French custom that on this Sunday they have a cake

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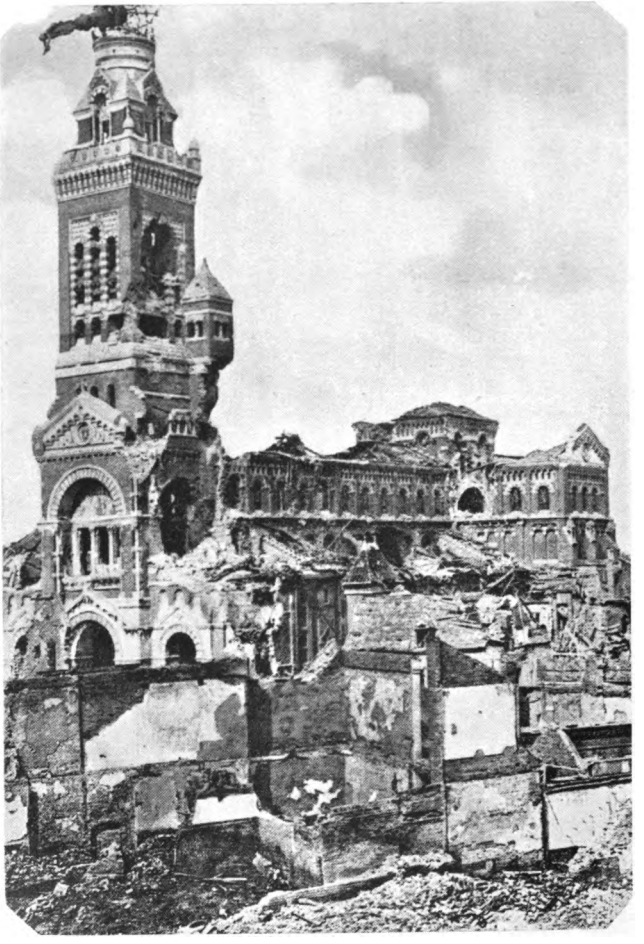

ALBERT CATHEDRAL.
1917.

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with a little figure of a King inside it and the one who gets it in his slice has to choose a queen etc.

Well as a compliment to me I had the King, but dispensed with the Queen!! I have got it as a little souvenir. After this repast I went back to the station (about midnight) and with great difficulty got into the *salle d'attente* and slept on the floor. I had to get up this morning before the *chef de gare* arrived so I had a pretty awful night. This morning I telephoned H.Q.'s —— Division about the transport and they promised to send it. They hadn't expected me for two days—Army all over—We waited till 2 P.M. and at last they came. We went on in G.S. waggons with 6 mules in. One ran away and gave me the jim jams all over. I hate mules. When I arrived at H.Q.'s they said they didn't know what I had come for and didn't want me but I had better go on and I should find the officer in charge of gum boots of the Division, leaving the line, and he would tell me what to do. En route we passed through [Albert] very knocked about. There is a statue of the Holy Virgin and Child on the Cathedral knocked off by a shell, hanging over the road at right angles to the spire. It must have had a sort of stick support which prevents it falling right off but the effect is extraordinary

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and the people here say that when it falls the war will end. All I can say is that I don't want to be underneath, as it is a huge thing. Our Lord's hands are stretched out and in its present position it looks as though He were blessing the people who pass underneath.

At last we got to the store—dark again. This place is an awful wilderness, a sea of mud. It was originally behind the German lines but we got it in the battle.

It is just as far as one can see mile after mile of shell holes and wretched trenches. I went to find the fellow in charge and he was in his dug-out, an old captured Boche one. I made a dignified entrance by falling down the steps which were very slippery and numerous as all Hun dug-outs are deep. I of course was very hungry having had nothing to eat all day but when dinner time came the servant brought in some stale bread and said that we couldn't have tea as there wasn't enough water to last. It is almost impossible to get here. Rather a change after my luxurious mess! He said that there was a small dug out near which I could have but he warned me to be careful not to lose my way and also that there was a trench outside by which I could recognise it as there were 3 dead huns there never buried. This all cheered

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me up ! I found the dug-out and my servant started bailing the water off the floor. We found an empty kerosene tin and made a stove, and 2 stretchers and made 2 beds and he and I are sharing it. I am writing this in bed and he is drying the clothes and we are very snug and warm. To-night is the worst night I ever remember, sleet and rain and freezing. You must understand that we are some way back from our present line and safe enough only somewhat noisy, but that is only because it is my first time near the guns.

Next morning.

We have had a very peaceful night though it snowed a bit. I was woken up suddenly by one of our large guns going off somewhere quite close and it nearly shook the whole place down. I put my torch on and there was a great rat on the floor ! Excuse scrawl as I am writing under great difficulties. We get no papers or letters here and nothing except ration food so send me something. When my Battn. has got up here from where they have been resting I shall be able to send over for letters to them.

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In Bed, — Dump, January 10.

I have heard nothing of anybody since Sunday and have seen no papers for a week.

The day before yesterday I had to go up to visit a forward soup kitchen at [Contalmaison] or where that place was when it was a village. The kitchen was just behind the trenches and there I found the —th Royal Scots of which Battn. Cappell is the Padre so I found out where he was and went to see him to-day. He was in bed sick and looking bad, but says he is going to England to-morrow with any luck. He has promised to write to you, and as my division is relieving his, he will know everything about where we shall be, where I now am and what I am doing so you will get first hand information of my doings and movements. I sent my servant down to him this afternoon with the nose of a German shell we got. It is rather a fine souvenir and it will make an inkstand I think. He promised to take it home to Dyonèse for me and also a 'tin hat' if he can carry it, but unless his servant goes with him he will be too heavily laden.

However let me know if the shell nose arrives because it is worth keeping and I picked it up on a field that will be always famous. There are any amount of things lying about here Boche

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and English only they are too heavy to get home and some too unpleasant. There are some very gruesome things lying around, and it doesn't do to poke about too much I can assure you.

Well—we are winning this war all right. To give you an instance. As I just said, I went up to visit this soup kitchen and on my way back Fritz put over 6 shells between me and home. In a moment or two the whole world belched out flame (it was just dusk) and for that 6 he got about 600 back. God knows what they are going through because they have not had time to build the deep dug-outs they so love and our guns *never* stop. I think their nerves will go in under a month—a man can't stand it. Prisoners are always coming in to give themselves up and they sometimes get right through our lines and right back here without knowing where they are. That is why my servant and I share this dugout to be ready for any unwelcome visitors.

But nothing wakes me. This morning about 8 o'ck. we had a strafe. Morris in the Fusiliers who is doing this job too came in about 10 o'ck. and said, well that wasn't too bad was it? I asked what he meant, and he asked what I was doing at 8 A.M. I said I was asleep, and he

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was astounded that I had slept through it all with a —" gun outside my door. He doesn't know what I am like in the morning. I think you must show this to Moon it will amuse her! We are shockingly badly off for drink. It is always tea at every meal and full of sand at that. My servant is perfectly splendid. He has been out since August 1914 and looks after me just like Harry would. Never lets me go anywhere alone. He wants some socks so will you send as many as you can possibly lay hands on, any number at all because they are everything. We wear these long boots which the Army call 'gum boots, thigh' and they are very good but make your feet hot and the socks are wet when you get them off.

I have got a deaf cat that I found in a dug-out, so that keeps off the rats. That and one hawk are the only living animals besides rats and horses that I have seen here that are fools enough to stay! You can't distinguish any landmarks here at all. It is rather like one enormous rabbit warren, no green stuff showing at all. Where the villages have been there are broken stumps of trees for as you know there are only trees round villages in this part of France. I hate to see the remains of trees all smashed to pulp and burnt. I saw to-day a mound

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labelled —— Church. That was all to show that people had once lived there. The peasants are wanting to come back again. I can't think what they will do and I guess they will have a pretty jumpy time when they start ploughing as the ground bristles with duds (unexploded shells).

Well Cappell will write and tell you more than I can write. Get a *Daily Mail* airman's map of the district like the one of the Ypres section and you will be able to see exactly where I am. I do wish you and Harry could come here and look for treasures for the 'Depôt.' There are some fine ones lying round. I often see some particularly fine object of art and think how priceless it would be up at the Cresswell.

My conception of the value of things has undergone rather a change, some dry firewood or an iron sheet for the roof now to my mind outvalues that Queen Victoria black penny stamp I used to admire so much, and so on. I can't find out whether I am here permanently or whether I rejoin my Battn. when they come up. However I will let you know. I am afraid this is not exactly an exciting letter, but no doubt you will be glad to have it. It is a scrawl but it is difficult to write under the circumstances. I am feeling extremely well and quite enjoying life.

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THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION.
Jan. 13, 1917.

Your last letter will be very late I am afraid as it only went off this morning. We have to send letters to the Divisional HeadQs. and they go by the runner, and unless there are despatches to be taken he can't make a special journey. Well, it has been raining as usual to-day. This morning it snowed, but I am glad to say it has stopped. We had a busy day yesterday getting two Battns. fitted out with gum boots on their way up to the line. We have been rather wretched lately because yesterday no rations came up, and to-day only ½ quantity—result nothing to eat and no candles. I managed to buy a candle for a franc from a Scotchman in the road so we have a light as long as that lasts.. We have lived lately on bully beef, and tea without sugar and milk. The man who acts as cook is a Figian, of 55. He likes his tea to brew for about 4 hours after it is ready to drink. I *think* he was employed as a poisoner in the Antipodes before he came out here. However he does his best and he only has the lid of a dixi to do all his cooking in.

I was thinking this evening as I walked back from [Contalmaison] in the reserve line how astonished you would be if you could see this

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place. You would never believe me if I tried to describe it or at least if I could describe it.

What I think it is most like is the most depressing view in the 'Black Country' that you can find. Take away all buildings and for cinders put brown earth all churned up into millions of shell holes and smashed trenches. Cover the whole with thick mud—fill all depressions with water, scatter round thousands of empty beef tins ,broken rifles, braziers, cart limbers, etc. pieces of men's clothing, boots and equipment and add a continuous roar of guns—there mustn't be a tree, a house or a bird in the scene, but just as far as you can see all round rolling mud covered with débris—well, you can't imagine now what it is like, but I can tell you it is horrible.

I found a little dog a day or two ago and brought it to my dug-out. I called it 'Poz' after this delectable place but to-day it has gone. I am afraid my servant has driven it away as he said it spoilt the new sawdust he had put down on the floor. 'Poz' never minded the shells but he was frightened at the mud. The Battn. is still marching up. When they arrive I shall rejoin them I expect. Well, the candle is going out and I shall only just have time to wash in the steel helmet which I am using as a wash basin—and it makes a very good one,

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before darkness will be upon me. It is only 7.30 P.M.

O/C DIVISIONAL CO., 2ND DIV., B.E.F.
Jan. 15, 1917.

Well as you see I have changed again. To start at the beginning. I was sent up to [Pozière] with men for gum boot stores with orders to return to the Battn. when I had handed the draft over.

The reason why I was sent was because it was Sunday morning. I had got up early to go to an early service and was the only person in the mess when the Adjutant came in. I got the draft up and was told to wait there for the Battn.

I just helped with the gum boots etc. and yesterday was told to report to the Divisional Headquarters. Then they asked me to take over the command of the Divisional Company. I said I thought I ought to be with my Battn. but the Staff Colonel said it wasn't anything to do with what I wanted and I must take this job. He said it means very hard work and 'if you can manage it will be a feather in your cap.' Of course I don't have to go to the trenches and gain in that way but I don't like leaving the Battn. I have got a good sergeant-major

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and quartermaster Sergeant and so ought to do all right. As far as I can make out it isn't half a bad job as I get a horse to myself and a groom and my servant and orderly and am more or less on my own. I am now in a village [Aveluy] farther back a bit than [Pozière] in fact though it is very much knocked about one can tell it is a village. I mess with what is called the Divisional Company mess composed of the Salvage officer, A.P.M., Burials officer and transport officer for the Division. I think I have got a job that belongs to a much more experienced man but as I happened to be on the spot they caught me. It will be a good experience no doubt if I can manage it. We are in a derelict house in this village. It is the only one that is anything like whole which is very extraordinary. It is far less depressing and gruesome than where I was and the messing is quite good.

(Finished at breakfast, 16/1/17.)

They are ragging me now because the Germans shelled again in the night and I slept through everything. My deep slumbers are proving very useful here. The night before last when we were up in our dug-out at [Pozière] I was woken up by rats, *enormous* things. They tore my magazine to pieces and walked on my bed.

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My servant thought that 'Poz' the dog had come back and put out his hand to stroke him and was bitten by a rat and we couldn't find the matches and there was an awful scuffle and the bed upset. I was convulsed with laughter—a sense of humour saves one here—anyway there are no rats here yet. Well I must off it to my office. I will write and tell you all about my work.

DIVISIONAL CO., B.E.F., Jan. 16.

This afternoon at last I found out where my battn. was and sent my servant over on my horse to get my letters. He brought back 21!! an accumulation of 10 days. It was wonderful and I have been reading them for an hour.

They range from Lewis to Gregory of m' tutor's and from Harry to Madame Brigogne interspersed with those from home.

I went down a very deep dug-out the other day thinking it was uninhabited to look for firewood. There was a Scotch officer lying on a wire bed asleep. For a moment in the light of the candle I thought he was in need of O/C Burials, but he woke up and we talked a bit and I learnt that he had been at the Camp near home and knew our village. Funny how one meets fellows out here.

The 2nd Battn. is quite near here and when

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I have time I shall ride over. Perhaps Abadie[1] will be back by then. Smith went to them instead of to us I am sorry to say.

You will be wanting to hear about my new job. This morning I was in the office getting things explained by the Sergt.-Major and I said, 'I hope Generals don't pop in and ask awkward questions' and he said 'no never.' At that moment the door of the Hut opened and in came the Divisional General. He was very nice and said that he wanted me to take over the Divisional compy., Camp Commandant of 3 blocks of huts to house a brigade. They are in a shocking state, knee deep in mud and I have got to get roads and duck boards made drains etc. etc. and do all the apportioning of huts to Battns. as they come out of the trenches. It's going to be some job, but interesting and I have plenty of N.C.O.'s so shall manage all right though I ought to be an engineer as well as a super clerk. He told me to get as many men as I wanted from the C.R.E.'s and to get working parties from the Battn. and if they made any difficulties to let him know immediately, so backed up by the Division I shall be all right but I can see that it will want some tact

[1] Colonel Abadie, commanding 2nd Batt. K.R.R.C. Reported missing July 10, 1917.

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especially when my own Battn. is here. I have got a *very* nice little horse, quite a dear little thing.

This house is as I told you the only one habitable in this village and we have a very good mess. Old Captain Johnson who runs it asked me when I arrived if I had any chairs or firewood in my luggage! They have all moved into the cellar and it is just about the coldest spot I have ever struck but I have stayed in a bedroom upstairs. After the dug-out where I came from at [Pozière] it is luxury. I can tell you I had a pretty rough breaking in there as far as shelling goes but here it is as safe as houses. I think the reason why this house isn't touched is because it must have belonged to a German. It is the only house in the village with two stories. When I say not touched, I mean it is whole. It has got those sort of holes which in that Bairnsfather's picture shows where the man just out says 'What makes them there 'oles.' The fed up one 'Mice.' You have no idea how wonderful Bairnsfather is. I resemble his pictures very closely this freezing weather. I am sure you would pass me by on the other side of the road if you saw me and say why isn't that disgusting tramp in uniform. 'What did you do in the great war Dad.'

To-day it has frozen hard all the time and

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the mud is hard enough to walk on which is a comfort. It is awful out here,—I mean the mud. The horses and mules get in a shocking state and die in it and of it.

Yesterday I saw a Tank. They are cute things all stripes and spots like a mandril.

No I don't want anything for my men as I now have 480 under me exclusive of those working as my assistants as Camp Commandant. Of course they are all scattered about and I never see a quarter of them except to pay them. They are all Divisional shoemakers, carpenters, boot-makers etc. etc., and men temporarily unfit.

Well I really must stop as these mice holes make this place pretty draughty and I must write some more letters. I really enjoy being out here *very* much as I know you are not fussing about me.

January 17.

Just a line—too busy to write more. Snowed all last night and it's pretty freezing. In haste.

In the Office, Jan. 18, 9 p.m.

I have been here since 9 a.m. and shall not get away until midnight. Parcel just arrived. Vermin pants, pheasant butter etc. all most acceptable and many thanks.

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Really haven't time to write to-day and may not have for some days to come. Must get this show into running order first—awful state at present.

Div. Co., January 20.

Had an awful day. All my huts changed hands and all day people have been complaining to me about their accommodation. However I think things are settled now. Things got so bad that some R.E.'s whose horses were in the wrong lines got so enraged when I tried to move them to make room for someone else that they put a guard with fixed swords in their lines and the officer told my sergeant-major he would jab him with a bayonet if he didn't give over and go away. I can tell you this is a thankless job and by sticking rigidly to my instructions I have made innumerable enemies! The Battn. is now in one of my own blocks of huts. The C/O tells me he has applied for me to go back to my Battn. with what success I don't know. The Division probably won't let me go but I rather hope they do. I am getting dreadfully 'moidered' with all this work and my sergeant has gone sick. I hear that Colonel Abadie rode over to where I was with the gum

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boot store to see me but unfortunately couldn't trace me. The 2nd is not very far away and directly I can I will go over and see him.

Last night, early in the morning at least about 1 A.M. some wretched officer came to try and find me to get billets for 60 men who were outside with nowhere to go. He got as far as this house and Capt. Johnson who woke up called him into the cellar where he woke everyone with his complaints except me. They told him I was the person who might be able to help him and he tried to wake me up, much to the amusement of everyone. After vigorous shaking I sat up in bed. He asked if I could find him any accommodation to which I replied, 'No,—you get right out.' This apparently annoyed him so much that he beat a hasty retreat and I never heard any more of him. The funny part is that this morning I haven't any recollection of it at all but this is what they tell me happened. My deep slumbers amuse everyone because in the heaviest bombardment I never move!

The Battn. is up to strength now and the new fellows seem a very nice lot, in fact the whole Battn. is very nice. The weather is still terrifically cold. I think this is the hardest winter I ever remember. Our household here would amuse you. Our cook was lately employed at

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the Savoy, one waiter is just an ordinary Tommy and the other might have been junior waiter at 'the Swan' or something of that sort. We eat the pheasant last night and it was much appreciated.

January 19.

At last I have a minute to write. The last two days I have been shocking busy and still am. The Division keeps sending me through frantic messages 'get 100 wire beds put up, and so many washing places etc. by the day after to-morrow.' Once I can get the Camp in working order I shall be all right, but it is simply in an awful state at present.

Your parcel arrived to-day. Thank Moon for the bags which will be invaluable. We have all had to move into the cellars. The Huns have been giving this place hell lately. They generally start as we are finishing dinner. Captain Johnson, another man, Burials officer and self sleep in the cellar on the racks for the beer barrels. It is a round arched place exactly like the old underground before electric trains started. Johnson treats the mess as if he were the host and we all guests. We have only one chair made of packing cases and he always sits in it unless

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I can get in first which I try to! His speciality is the bread. We have ration bread of course and unless you knew you wouldn't recognise army bread as bread at all. Anyhow he has it cut in slices with all the crust *cut off* and brought in on a plate. I insist on having ½ a loaf to myself with the crust left on and he thinks this very bad 'table manners' but we get on quite well really. The Battn. is still in reserve and won't be going into the trenches for a while yet but I suppose I stay at this job. Out here the weather is awful, but I am quite warm as I have plenty of clothes and wear a Tommies fur coat which makes me look like a neolithic man but is quite warm. I have about 100 letters to censor before I go to my barrel rack so good-night.

Sunday, January 21.

Your letter and the parcel for Madame Magnier has just come. Her address is Noyelles en Chausseé, Par Crécy, Somme, and I am sure she will be *delighted* with the shawl. I wrote her a note when I sent it on. To-day is Sunday. Last night I thought it was Tuesday. One absolutely loses count of the days of the week. Sunday means nothing out here. When one is resting one does no work on Sunday in the Battn.

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but up here we never get any time off at all. To-day for instance the Battn. has been on road fatigues since 8 A.M. and I have been in my office and buzzing round ever since then and now it is 6.30 P.M. You see you simply can't stop things. We have one Chaplain between two Battns. and he has voluntary services, but I shan't have time to go I expect until I get back to the Battn. I saw the O/C to-day and he says he has written again to get me back. Events will show results. Smith was over from the 2nd to-day. I shall try and ride over to lunch with them Tuesday if the frost breaks and I can get away from the Camp. I have some men near them who haven't been paid for 3 weeks so I can kill two birds with one stone but directly my back is turned things seem to get upset. Even in the night I have to telephone to H.Qs. Last night they wanted to speak to me and I went 2 miles at 10 P.M. to telephone to them and then it wasn't anything very urgent.

It is still freezing hard. I should think there will be skating in Blighty this year. I hope you get my letters as I write every day, but transport is such a difficulty here. I do hope when we move elsewhere it will be right away from here and to some sector where the country has not been so desolated. If only there were some

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peasants living around one could buy eggs and green stuff.

January 22.

It is snowing again and we are still hard bound with frost.

I have had a very busy day. The Boche have been very quiet lately and haven't worried us at all. I hear another officer has been offered to the Division if they will let me go.

January 23.

Well, I think to-day has been the coldest day I ever remember. The sun has shone all day and a perfect blue sky but *freezing* and an awful wind.

The result of a clear sky has been a ceaseless aerial battle up above, very pretty to watch with the shrapnel bursting in white puffs miles up. So far as I could see no one fell down, but the results will be felt to-night if the Boche has been able to get any aerial photographs.

To-day I have chosen the neolithic style of dress. One can either dress like a 20th century soldier, or as a Cromwellian in steel helmet and leather jerkin without sleeves which looks very much like the period 1649–62, or with a woollen knitted helmet and fur coat—neolithic.

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The men wear these fur coats or leather jerkins and I have one of each. The fur coats are very warm and comfortable and quite all right as long as they are kept clean. They are made of different animals' furs and so one can recognise one's friends by the furs they are wearing. For instance my sergeant-major sports a coat made of yellow cats' skins, the sergeant a black bear skin, whilst mine is badger with black bear skin sleeves a very distinguished result. They are quite short coming down as far as the tunic. When I am really dressed up you would scream with laughter. Trench boots with stockings showing over the top, riding breeches stuffed out with paper—fur coat, woollen helmet with steel helmet on top with the chin strap hooked under the hair behind like an old fashioned hat: add my waterproof gauntlets and a long staff which I use as a walking stick and I can tell you I am some knut!

I had the sanitary inspector round the Camps to-day and he was quite pleased with the improvements. I believe the General is coming round to-morrow.

January 24.

Again too busy to write. More moves taking place. An officer has just come in and asked

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if I could give him blankets for 50 men. I asked if he thought I grew blankets. But I do feel sorry for homeless wanderers at this time of night, 9 P.M. on a freezing dark wintry night. All I can say is that I hope when next I am stranded the Camp Commandant I have to deal with will take half as much trouble as I do about my unwelcome stranded guests. A major has just arrived foodless and bedless evidently very ill. I have given him a bed and some food and hope he won't die in the night but he looks awful.

January 25.

I see good news of a Naval Battle in the N. Sea. Zeebrugge harbour frozen over and so we have driven them out, you can imagine from that what sort of weather we are having on the Continent. Firewood becomes increasingly difficult to find and we suffer dreadfully from the smoke of damp wood because in dug-outs and cellars the smoke has got to go up the stairs so you can imagine what it is like. I shall be like a smoked ham! Chimneys are impossible to make in dug-outs and difficult in cellars but in the line they can't even have a brazier so we aren't doing so badly.

The General came round yesterday and was

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very much pleased with the Camp. We are getting on fine with it now.

January 26.

Just a line. Have been censoring 200 or 300 letters and am quite tired as I walked up to the soup kitchen at —— to-day and that is about 5 miles each way across ice bound roads and duck boards. Terribly cold still and there has been a wind to make it worse.

The Boche put 100 shells in to here last night. We were just starting out on a rat hunting expedition amongst the ruins but they drove us in. All the birds are dead of the cold and the river is very nearly frozen across.

Saturday evening, January 27.

We have got a gramophone working by means of elastic bands and it is fine. Reminds me of all the splendid week ends I used to have. It is playing 'Destiny' now—so nice. We are sitting in an unfurnished room with no glass in the windows and 'mice holes' in the door and a brazier in the fire place. The only piece of furniture in the house is a carved wooden deer 'souvenir de Suisse' I should think.

After dinner the A.P.M. and I go out after

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rats in the ruins of the village. It is rather fun only the holes where cellars were make it rather difficult.

Last night we had just found our first rat when whizz—crump the usual evening strafe began. We were both flat on our stomachs in about 1/1000 part of a second and then made for our cellar like mad.

I dropped my torch in my hurry and nearly fell in the cellar and when we got in we sat down and cried with laughing. It was too funny. When it is quiet you can hear the German guns go off, pouff and then the whizz of the shell and then the crump of the burst. It always seems funny to me that sound should travel faster than the shell but it gives one warning and our cellar is as safe as anything.

I think it is too cold for the rats at present, but when the thaw comes I am having some fellows down from the 1st and we will have a real attack.

Well, to-morrow is Sunday. I wish I were going to Berkswich Church, but it is the same here as any other day.

I do wonder if you have seen Cappell. He will be able to tell you so much that is interesting as his Division was relieved by ours, and he knows exactly where I am. There is some

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lovely ice on a frozen lake here. I wish I had my skates. Well I must to bed and the Gramophone is getting tired.

IN THE FIELD, January 29.

I have had a very worrying day again relief taking place, but this afternoon I had an hour off and we all went out after partridges in the frozen marshes.

We thought they might be too starved to fly out of reach but though we saw lots we could not get near them to hit them down. Johnson trod on a water hen and that was our only bag. We spent the time sliding on the most wonderful ice I have ever seen 7″ or 8″ thick. I don't think the Division will allow me to go back to the Battn. They go in the trenches in two or three days but I am afraid I shan't be with them.

January 28.

The Division notified the Battn. to-day that they will not allow me to return to the Battn. in spite of having promised them someone else so that they appreciate my work which is something though I am sorry not to be with the Battn. However I have been taken against my will and

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have done my best to get back so things have been taken out of my hands. Of course I am better off here than in the trenches as they are wicked in this weather, especially on this sector. As it is I have nearly got frost-bitten fingers and ears. People's ears go black with frost bite which is most unpleasant.

I don't think you can be having anything like the weather we are here as I see in the *Times* that there is 'a thin coating of ice on the Serpentine,' whilst here the river is frozen hard enough to walk across on though it is very swift running.

The Boche put a shell into the lake this morning and it threw up a column of water about 90 feet high. It was awfully fine. I am getting quite fond of this little village. It has got a most delightful Chateau, now a dressing station. Of course it is horribly smashed up but it is more like an English country house than any I have seen in any part of France. I feel dreadfully sorry for the owner. If he could see his home and all his furniture smashed about. The Church is rather nice too though I should think a shell must have landed somewhere under the high altar—a horrible mess they have made of it.

Wonderful blue skies these days and the

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moon is getting full but just here that is about the worst thing possible.

January 30.

It has been much warmer to-day as there was not any wind, but I was told by a fellow at 11 A.M. this morning that there were 15° of frost so you can imagine what the last week has been like. We haven't been able to thaw the ink in the office without breaking the bottle. Of course we live on the mess rations exactly the same as the men but we supplement it with anything we can get and things are always acceptable. Luckily the cook is very good though very dirty and he makes the bully beef quite good. I am having things sent out from Fortnum and Mason every week and that helps a lot. We are going to try and get some bottled beer from Amiens and I hope we can though it is a long way away. What with the water from the river or from a well where anything may be lying at the bottom and which has to be boiled and then have chloride of lime in and Irish whisky, or tea with condensed milk which I abominate, I am rapidly becoming a non drinker.

Last night our rat hunt was rudely interrupted

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by machine gun fire which sounded quite close. Apparently a Boche airman came over the village and dropped a bomb and fired his machine gun into the street but I don't think he got anybody.

I feel very well in this cold weather, but I haven't had a bath for ages because I couldn't stand a cold bath with the draughts of this house!

To-day I had my hair cut by a Tommy and he cut off about half my ear which was trying. This afternoon to replenish the larder and having found some 12 bore cartridges I and another fellow went out after some partridges. We heard that the town major had a gun and so we went round and found he had one which I had found buried in the village.

It was a different size to our guns but we filed the cartridges and got two in the breech and sallied forth. The old major seemed rather shy of the gun so I took it. We found a huge covey of partridges so I let bang. I took the precaution not to put the butt into my shoulder and fired from the hip. (The birds were on the ground!) The discharge snapped the stock and burst the barrel all to smithereens! We had got hold of some blank cartridges used to fire trench mortars which were crammed with powder, but had no charge. With my usual luck I wasn't

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a bit hurt only bruised my finger with the trigger guard. I couldn't make out why I hadn't killed anything. The old major nearly burst into tears and kept saying what would have happened if there had been an accident, he would have been court martialed! Of course it is forbidden to shoot game and we had waited till the A.M.P. was away! It was rather disappointing because the gun is no good again, but I think I had my share of luck that time.

That night the Boche aeroplane came they got two men asleep in a house by firing their machine gun through the roof which is a scuggish trick I think so we are well in the cellar. Don't get the wind up over the little accident with the gun such things will happen. Still freezing hardest winter for many years.

February 1.

My battn. went into the trenches to-night and I feel I ought to be with them. It is snowing again and bitterly cold, and I am rather glad I am not, but I tried my best to get back and couldn't.

Just as I started this letter two wretched officers who have just come out and were sent up the line to 'get learnt' came up to the house seeing it was fairly whole and explained that

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they had just come out of the trenches and could they sleep here so we have given them an egg each and some soup and now they are asleep on the floor very grateful for the hospitality which means a lot when the alternative is sleeping in the street. They are middle aged men of about 35, rather like m' tutor only now they are dirty and unshaven and blue with cold. Of course after their happy home this is rather a wretched start for them and I have been through it and know what it feels like to be stranded in the middle of the night. Fuel rations get worse and worse and we now get ¾ lb. of coal a day per man and no wood and that has to do the cooking as well. We are all right being in the village, but the men burn every available thing and get court-martialed for it! I have got a very funny little puppy now, a cross between a French and a German dog that strayed over the lines I should think. At present he is like a tiny marmoset and sleeps in a tin helmet! I hope I don't lose him like the other but I expect I shall. Well I must to bed—so good-night.

February 2.

The A.P.M. has been to Amiens to see life and has brought us back some fish and cabbages

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also a pair of skates so we ought to have a feast to-night and rather fun so long as the ice lasts, which seems for ever. Green stuff is most acceptable though I ordinarily object strongly to cabbage I quite look on it as a luxury now.

Fritz has put the wind up us all this morning by putting 79 shells into the village! I don't think they did any damage though. We think they are armour piercing Naval guns he uses owing to the noise they make. This house as usual was not touched I really think it must have belonged to a Hun. I tell you these little points of interest as I know you won't mind and they are interesting. You write that it's a compliment to you that as you don't worry I feel quite happy and set out to enjoy myself but really when one feels that you only have yourself to look after and no one at home is fussing one can afford to laugh at everything and I don't mind at all what happens now. I am expert at knowing when it is time to flop down behind a wall and when a shell goes high over in the air it doesn't matter at all. One soon learns though that the longer one is out here the more nervous one gets. I saw two Boche prisoners this morning who came across our lines last night. They were quite nice—one 20, and the other one 30, with children. One spoke English and said they had lost their

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way which is very easy to do but I don't think it was true as he was very cheerful. He said that until lately they had been fairly well fed in the front line, but when in the support trenches very badly fed, but now even in the actual front line they only had black bread and marmalade and very occasionally some canned beef but there was never enough to eat and any one who could get across was considered lucky but it was very dangerous to try. Though I have been here some time now, I never knew till to-day that there was a large cemetery within 50 yards of this house. I discovered it whilst rat hunting. It is rather interesting as it was originally French and one can trace all the battles here till we took over and then our graves. Adjoining was the old civilian cemetery with its dreadful glass bead wreaths and two funny little chapels but it was in a sad state as there had been trenches through the cemetery and the walls were loopholed and everything smashed about but that was probably in Aug. 1914. The Chapels and endless crucifixes in this country always astonish the men but as one said to me the other day 'you'd think these 'ere Frenchmen were very religious with their crosses and what not, but they are that there deceitful you can't tell.' I think now that he fancies they are

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put there purposely to deceive 'poor 'armless Tommies'!

From what I can hear the Battn. is getting a pretty rough time in the line now and I am afraid it is bad for everyone who has not been in yet but though we can hear the strafe going on we don't know what happens till the London papers arrive several days later. Well, I smell the cabbage and so I must prepare to celebrate this red letter day.

February 4.

I went up into the line this morning to see the Battn. but didn't get much information. I only went as far as the support line because there is no real front line here, only small groups of shell holes with no communication trenches and you can't get to them during the day at all. They haven't suffered heavily I am glad to say, no officers were hit but my company was in the front line so I couldn't get to them and it is too far to go at night to visit them.

There was the hell of a strafe on our left last night for some hours and while I am writing this another seems going on. Last night there was just a continuous thunder of guns. What happened I don't know but you can look at the

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communiqué for the 3rd and see. I hope it was a success. What the poor devils the other end must be going through no one knows. It must be just *hell*, but they deserve all they get, and every Boche dead the sooner the war ends though it is horrible. Johnson and I are quite friends now and laugh heartily at each other's jokes. He said that during his life he had had a good many corners knocked off and I said he must be a very many sided man which really was funny and we all roared over it. We call him the King of Aveluy. What a winter. Freezing always. This is I believe the 24th continuous day of frost and we are all feeling fed up.

February 7.

Your letter written in the train arrived yesterday. I was so glad to hear that Dyonèse's presentation at the Mansion House went off successfully, but it was a pity the medal hadn't arrived in time. Your letters aren't at all dull and I enjoy getting them as they bring a breath of home with them. You ask about this place, well it is the ordinary straggling French village with mud houses, chateau, church and one brick house 'étage' as they call it. This is the one

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we live in or under. It is literally the only house that is anything like intact and the only time it was touched was a night or so after I arrived when they hit the chimney. I was sleeping upstairs then but came down as fast as I could. There is no furniture of any sort or kind and all the woodwork has been burnt. Every other house in the village is more or less ruined but they all have cellars built after 70 I think. The men live in them. We have made ours very comfortable and fixed up a fine stove with bricks and clay and a pipe poking out into the back yard. The top of the fire is covered with one of these iron notice boards you see on the houses at X roads directing the way. I am sure you know them—generally painted blue. On this one we have got —— 3½ kilos and so on, 4 names all famous now.

The floor is earth and there is a tiny grating which is just the level of the street. We have a curtain of sandbags over the door and are very snug indeed and I feel very grateful for it. The beds are just 4 pieces of wood with rabbit netting and resting on petrol tins and are very comfortable. In the room above we mess and the kitchen is opposite. The upstairs rooms are uninhabitable. The servants and cook sleep in the dug-outs under the stables. To get to my

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camp we have to go out of the village and across a causeway over what were marshes, but the dams keeping them dry were burst by shells and now the place is a gigantic lake, so I cut across on the ice which is over a foot thick. The village is honeycombed with trenches used by the French I think and under the Church there is the most gigantic sort of underground fort full of passages. I went in to-day after a rat but got stuck half way and had to come out on all fours through another entrance feeling exactly like Teufel after he has been down a rabbit hole. I had my fur coat on and it must have been exactly like a dog coming out of a hole when I re-appeared. I can't say where the people who lived here have gone, but there aren't any left. There are a few trees in the village but these are the last you can see for 5 or 6 miles when you get out as all the trees, villages etc. were smashed in the push. The trenches are about an hour and a half away to walk, over the most horribly depressing country, nothing but shell holes. You *can't* imagine that there ever was anything there, but there were villages.

I had a nice letter from the D.A.Q.M.G. Colonel Stuart about the Camp. He said he had inspected it and was much pleased with progress, but what I dislike about my job is the responsi-

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bility as O/C Div. Cos. Besides having the power of an ordinary Company commander, I have the powers of 'O/C Detachment' in other words the powers of a Commander of a Battn. I have never had any experience of interior economy and I have these difficult cases brought up before me and have practically unlimited powers of punishment. Of course I never thought I should be in a position like this because it is a Battn. Commander's powers. Well I must stop and off to bed so good night.

February 8.

Last night just as we were going off to bed Fritz started a new joke—an aeroplane arrives, drops 19 gigantic bombs and sweeps the street with machine gun fire. Shells I don't mind because they come at an angle and give you a chance but bombs are beastly. However all went off well. This morning I was up at the Camp where we have never been worried before when suddenly there was a terrific explosion and a column of earth flew up about 300 yards away. It was a *cloudless* morning and we all thought 'more bombs' but no, not a sign of anything in the sky. For an hour and a half this continued and they gave us 20. As you

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know when a shell comes it makes a whirring kind of scream coming through the air and gives one time to duck, but, with this thing there was no noise, just as if a mine had gone up.

They were all over the place and you never knew where the next one was going to be. It really was *extraordinary*. *No one* can make out what it is, but as an aeroplane couldn't possibly carry so much I think it was a Zeppelin so high up that it was out of sight though it seems almost impossible and the other alternative is that the Boche are using one of those enormous naval guns that have such high velocity that the shell travels without making any noise. We have found a gigantic piece of lead which was evidently part of it. That makes it impossible for it to have been a gun but then how could a Zepp. be so high as to be out of sight? It is just a mystery and as long as it doesn't happen again it doesn't matter what it is.

The fact that you couldn't see or hear anything made it so extraordinary, and I was afraid the horses would stampede but they didn't. I don't think there was one casualty and I daresay they wasted between £3000 and £4000 worth of stuff.

I see all sorts of horrible new food regulations in England. I would rather be here I think

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than have all those sort of forced economies. I think we get the best of it here in most ways. Hope it is all over soon.

February 9.

We have come to the conclusion that our visitors of yesterday were shells and not bombs, and belonged to a 13.3 Naval gun whose shells stand 5 feet high! Horrible things to come buzzing around, but they do surprisingly little damage, except on buildings. I hope you don't think of me as being uncomfortable because I am not at all and *very* lucky to have such a nice place as a cellar to live in—I daresay it will become flooded when the rain comes but sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.

February 10.

Not much news. We were disturbed early this morning again by that Boche aeroplane and they shelled the camp this morning. They only put over 4; 2 went into the lake, one was a dud but the 4th landed bang in one of the horse lines about 100 yards from my office where I was. It killed 4 mules, mutilated 3 most horribly and wounded 3 more and 3 men.

It was a most horrible affair altogether but

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it is the first time they have had any luck. Burying them is so hard in the frozen ground. The transport men got the other horses and mules cut loose quickly and luckily there was no stampede or anything. I had a beautiful bath this evening in my rubber bath in front of the stove in the cellar and feel quite clean. One gets terribly dirty from soot in these cellars and dug-outs as the smoke chiefly goes out at the door !

February 11.

No time for a letter to-night but will write to-morrow.

February 12.

There is no news to tell you. We have just come in from a most exciting rat hunt where I nearly fell down a cellar in my excitement. As you see from the papers things are pretty warm in this sector and will be warmer before many moons.

February 13.

Very little news. Lovely day to-day, and I had to go to a neighbouring village so rode over and had a most delightful ride.

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February 14.

How splendid that you have got the map and know where I am. Yes, I live in the same village as the chateau a bit further up the street and on the other side. We have had a very peaceful day and by way of celebrating Sunday I and a fellow named H—— who is in the mess and a very nice chap went to explore the underground passages and dug-outs below the Church. The passages run for 100's of yards and are very well made, built by the French I suppose. Two more mules had to be shot making 9 dead in all, rather a heavy loss. We have buried them all in an old dug-out.

The A.S.C. lorry passing here the other day dropped a whole frozen sheep and we have had a gigantic meal or meals of legs of mutton and all sorts of things. The cook rushed out and dragged it in!

I enclose some postcards of a neighbouring town which show the extraordinary way the figure on the top of the Cathedral hangs over the street as I told you.

February 15.

I have had a long and trying day so more to-morrow. They have just started dropping more presents from planes so I must 'op it.

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February 17.

I am sorry not to have written yesterday but I have been very busy. You will by the time you get this have seen what has happened on this front but so far we don't know and only get wild rumours. My Battn. is in it and I hear has been cut up but hope for the best. Naturally we are all anxious and fidgetty. We ask the wounded as they come in but a fog came over to-day and no one seems to know anything. I thought when they got Grandcourt they would have taken away the guns that shell us but they haven't. I told you we had had 9 mules killed, and the night before last the Sergt. Major woke me up at 2 A.M. to say that a shell had hit one of the huts in the camp and killed three K.R.R.'s and I have been worried about getting everything settled over that, and last night they got 5 more men in this village and all the officers' chargers of the —— Light Infantry. They had an awful job getting them out from the wreckage so I have had a lot of extra work to get done and haven't had much time.

Wounded and prisoners stream down but we can't get any definite information. I do hope all has gone well. With our cellar we are perfectly safe and can't get anything on us so

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you may be quite happy, and if I were not here I should be with the Battn. in this show and far worse off God knows.

Haig's speech is encouraging and I think everything is going well. A Hun officer who had been out since the beginning said the food was bad and that he was glad to be taken. He was caught unawares he said, and showed us a letter which was taken from him which he had just got and hadn't had time to open. It began 'Lieber Johann, I do hope you will be back soon' or something of that sort—well he is on his way to Donington Hall and Blighty now I suppose.

I am really very glad that you don't fuss about me. I have never felt worried at all myself. I am having a very good time and am feeling very well and happy. The thaw has come and the mud is starting again in all its glory. The puppy is very flourishing and quite domesticated. I hope I shall get it home though I am afraid you won't think much of its ancestry. I got three knives this morning from a friend of mine in charge of the prisoners' cage and if I get any more I will send one as a *souvenir de la guerre* to Harry! 10 P.M. I must to bed. We have had a quiet day and I hope may have a peaceful night. I daresay *they* have had enough for to-day!

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February 18.

Not much to-night. Fritz has given us the hell of an afternoon and we must have had 100 or 150 shells over, but still merry and bright. The Battn. comes out to-night much cut up I fear. I shall see them to-morrow and can tell you what happens. Had a terrifically busy day and feel half asleep so good-night.

February 19.

I have been up to see the Battn. this morning. They came out of the show during the night and keep coming in all day in driblets in an awful state. You would hardly know they were human beings. We have had some good fellows killed, but I am chiefly cut up about Derrick Eley. He joined just after me and was at Sandhurst and Eton with me. I saw him a day or so ago so cheerful going up the road armed with a pick stock. An only son and poor Mrs. Eley will be so cut up. My platoon sergeant commanding No. 8 in my absence was killed too I am afraid.

February 20.

The C/O saw the Divisional General yesterday and asked as a particular favour for me to come back to the Battn. as he lost so many officers

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in the show of the 17th. As a result I am to return to the Battn. I am rather fed up as I have to give up my comfortable quarters and start off again on my wanderings though I shall be in this neighbourhood. I went up to H.Qs. this afternoon and Colonel Stuart was most charming and said he was extremely sorry I had to go, said I had done extremely well and he would mention me to the Divisional General. If he doesn't forget it may lead to something but I return to platoon Commander after having been entirely on my own which is going to be rather hard. My successor arrived this evening and I feel rather miserable on handing over to him the result of my labours. Well, it can't be helped and I ought to go back to the Battn. if they want me. Rumour has it that we are going right back for a rest soon and I hope that is true.

February 21.

I have been busy all day showing my successor round. He seems quite nice. I have had a nice ride into the neighbouring town this afternoon [Albert].

I go back to the Battn. either to-morrow or the next day according to whether I have much to do in handing over.

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February 22.

I return to-morrow to the Battn. which is at present resting in one of my camps. They are not going into the line again for some time. The mud is awful and the weather foul. Had a nice ride this afternoon otherwise there is nothing to report on this front!

February 23.

I am back again with battn. in a crowded and cold hut and I lament my nice cellar left behind. I was very sorry to leave my last job where I was very happy. There we weren't always moving and you can imagine what it is like always being on the move with everything in a hold all!

February 24.

Not a great deal of news. We moved to another block of huts this morning. Everyone except me has got colds and no voices but I am all right so far. I went down to tea with old Johnson this evening. I was quite sorry to leave the little mess and got quite fond of him.

I don't know when we go in the trenches again. I call them trenches though there are no such luxuries, only isolated shell holes without

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dug-outs and more than enough mud I expect. I believe it is so terribly difficult not to get lost as there are no communication trenches and you have to wander about on the top looking for your shell hole. I don't think that any strafing goes on as both sides are too uncomfortable to want to make it worse! I miss Eley very much. It was rotten luck his being killed. My servant is furious with me for letting my job go as he has been out since Aug. 1914 and doesn't want any more fighting. Of course it was more or less my own doing because if I hadn't asked the C/O to get me back to the Battn. things would have remained as they were.

Well, I have to issue the rum out so I must away. To-morrow night I suppose it will be my turn for one of those accursed fatigues we do when we are out of the line or 'resting'— start at dusk, and back at dawn plunging about digging trenches behind the line or what not. Feeling very flourishing and hope you are too.

February 25.

Great news of the Boche retiring. I suppose we shall be moving up the line soon. The fatigue last night was digging a water pipe track in

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rather an unhealthy neighbourhood but we got on all right. The only misfortune I had was to fall into a shell hole and get covered with mud. My tin hat sank to the bottom ! ! but I fished it out again. I turned sexton before it got dark and buried some poor chaps that had been lying about since the autumn push. Funny what one does once one gets into this blinking army.

February 25.

I am going out on a fatigue this evening and expect I shall be out all night so will write a line before I start. I forget if I told you that Smith, my Company Commander at Sheerness is out again and has got 'B' Coy. He took a lot of trouble to get me back to his company and I am with my old platoon again No. 8 now. He is a splendid coy. commander and I get on very well with him. Get anyone you can to send me out socks for my platoon. 26 men at present. They came off very lightly in the stunt of the 17th and hardly lost anyone.

February 27.

Yes, my third month out here is getting on now and I hope for leave at the end of March or beginning of April if it opens again. I am

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looking forward to it anyhow. 10 days in England! *My hat!* The Boche seem to be falling back and a horrible rumour is about that we shall have to move forward and go under canvas. Even with floor boards it will be horrible in this mud and my opinion of the move is rather biassed!

I discovered to-day that this camp is in exactly what was before the beginning of the advance on July 1st 'No Man's Land.' Both lines of trenches are of course still exactly as they were left after having been occupied for two years near enough. I wandered along the old Boche front line and no wonder it was difficult to get them out—deep dug-outs all the way along. There was a machine gun emplacement with heaps of emptied bullets just as they had come out of the gun as Fritz had fired as hard as he could at our chaps coming across. I am sending some to Dyonèse.

February 28.

Your letter of the 23rd just come. I am so glad the new 'parlour' is so nice.

I am extremely sorry to hear Nurse Lyons has lost her son, but really I have come to the conclusion that it does not matter much. Everyone

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feels the same out here and I know you do. The only thing to wish for is a quick death if that is going to be your fate, and the ability to die bravely and indeed not to show what you really feel any time. Don't think I am getting depressed or want to get killed because I am extremely cheerful and I am going to do all I know to get through all right. A little discretion goes a long way and saves many people's lives.

It is my turn to go out on fatigue to-night which I detest, but it has to be done and we take it in turn amongst the subalterns. I had hoped to get into Amiens, but owing to the Boche retirement we are standing to and there is no chance of getting away. I haven't been in a civilized place since Rouen at Christmas and shall be glad to get somewhere to see life again. Well, so long. I love getting your letters and I hope you get all mine. I write every day though sometimes short and dull notes.

February 28.

I have been meaning to write and ask you to send my servant out a parcel and forgot to say so in my last letter.

He has been out ever since Aug. 1914 and has just been like an elder brother to me, really

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wonderful. Send him some cocoa, biscuits, socks or anything you can spare. He would appreciate them I know and he deserves them. When we go into the trenches he has to stick to me and will I know be invaluable.

March 1.

I have had quite an interesting morning on a working party. We started at 7.15 A.M. and got back about tea time but I quite enjoyed myself.

We went up within fairly close to the line but it was misty and we couldn't see anything. As you know we have moved forward lately and I thought we shouldn't be sent far up in daylight.

About 10 the mist cleared and the most brilliant sunshine came out and we found ourselves on the top of a ridge[1] with a valley below with two small ridges in it and beyond another ridge. It really was quite like the promised land because in the distance we could see woods and trees and even houses and we were standing on the edge of the wilderness.

A gunner Captain was talking to me and to my surprise he told me that on the far ridge was the Boche line and showed it me through his

[1] The Bapaume Ridge.

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glasses. I was amazed that we were allowed to work where we were in such a bright light, but they never bothered us at all and we watched our own and their shells bursting all along the line. In the distance I could see some tall factory chimneys which belonged to a certain large town of which we may hope to hear later. The road, with its trees along it, went into the valley through both lines and up the hill again. But what cheered me was to see the trees again. I sat on a broken tree and watched the shelling whilst a lark was singing and some partridges were buzzing about! While the men were working I wandered round after treasures feeling as if I were going round the Hall for the first time. I was lucky enough to find a Boche leather helmet now obsolete, but not a very good one. However on the way home I met a man who was carrying a perfect specimen which he found yesterday in one of the deserted villages. I bargained for it and will send it home. They are very scarce now and I am pleased to have one.

The gunner Captain was very civil. He was observing for his battery and telephoned back for them to send over a shell into the Boche trenches while I watched which was rather amusing. I have got a Boche bayonet, a long sort, and will

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get one of their entrenching tools which are like little shovels to use as a poker and shovel in my room. Just after tea I went out of the mess and saw an aerial fight. The Boche fired his machine gun and hit our plane who had to come down. He landed just outside the camp, hit his nose in a trench and did a complete somersault.

The pilot broke his wrist but got off jolly lightly. Don't forget to send Farndon some things will you.

Saturday, March 3.

Just a line as I am just off up the line. I went up yesterday to look round with Smith and Humphrey and we have got some dug-outs to go in. We are in the old Boche line. The Battn. goes up this evening at dusk and I suppose will be arriving some time to-morrow, but I expect we shall have a pretty peaceful time. I will try to write every day but it may be impossible for the transport to get up to us to carry letters back so don't be surprised or hurt if you don't hear. I have sent you my fur coat which will be nice for motoring and a Boche helmet. I do hope they will arrive safely.

Well cheer ho.—

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To his Father.

Midnight, March 4, 1917.
[Received March 14.]

We are in the support trenches now. I have just come in from a working party just behind the front line. We are in what was the Boche second line till a day or two ago and are living in a dug-out about 30 ft. deep and about 20 ft. × 6 ft. at the bottom. 3 officers and 3 servants.

I found your letter of Feby. 24th on my return and it was *really* nice to find it and cheered me up no end—so this is to thank you for it. This will go back with the ration party tomorrow evening.

Feeling very well but just at present somewhat tired. Excuse such a scrawl.

March 5. [Received March 14.]

They tell me it is the 6th but I don't know if it is and I have no idea what day it is! All merry and bright. Forgive a scrappy letter but we are doing a tour in the front line and can't write much. I was up all last night and we had a bit of a strafe which I will tell you about later.

We are not having too bad a time so far and I am quite enjoying myself but it is muddy

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and rather tiring and there isn't room in the only dug-out to lie down during the day but we shall be going out again soon and will live in comfort then. Last night as I said we had a strafe.—at 2 A.M. this morning I came into the dug-out and the serg. major brought down a letter from home—it really was *wonderful.* You have no idea how nice it is to get letters. I will write a proper letter when we get out again.

March 8. [Received March 14.]

We came out of the front line last night. We had a pretty cushy time and 'B' Coy. had no casualties except a case or two of frostbite and one man in my platoon suffering from nerves from being stuck in the mud. We had to dig the wretched man out!

But we certainly have had a most uncomfortable time. I can't tell you much yet but we made a mistake though it was unavoidable and didn't bring up our trench kit, soap, tooth brushes etc. and the result is we have not had a chance even of washing our faces or teeth for four days, and can't get our things now. We didn't bring any blankets and the cold has been intense. We were in the reserve line first where the men had two shafts of dug-outs to get in. They couldn't sleep as there wasn't room to lie

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down and they had to sit on the steps. We 3 officers could sleep and were fairly all right. In the front line the same thing happened while we three had to get into a passage dug into the bank about 4 ft. high and 4 × 12 ft. wide. The servants were with us and that was rather wretched as they had to cook and all in there, and there wasn't nearly enough room to stand up in.

My servant was as usual perfectly wonderful and got me hot tea over a candle with the greatest cuteness. After the 4 days the C.O. said that 'B' Coy. had had such a bad time, when we went back into the support dug-outs we should have the best there were. He found out from the Battn. relieving us which these were and when we arrived here in the early morning 2 A.M. what did we find? Some disused gun pits and it was blowing a blizzard and snowing! Well by 3.0 A.M. we had all got under cover and got some waterproof sheets up but this morning I was frozen nearly stiff. However during the day we have made things better and are fairly comfortable.

Our first night in the front line was rather amusing. Smith was acting 2nd in command of the Battn. and so a funny old bird called X—— was in command. He fought out in S. Africa and this was his first time in the trenches.

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I and the other subaltern had never been in before so we were an inexperienced lot. X. was very foolish for so old a man and insisted on walking about on top and wouldn't understand there was any difference between open warfare and trench war. However about 2 A.M. he suddenly saw 7 Boches in No Man's Land probably trying to mend their wire. This was too much for him. He rushed round telling everyone an attack was coming and we all stood to. At this moment our people put a terrific artillery barrage over on our left as I suppose someone was doing a stunt. Fritz got the wind up, thinks an attack is coming from our trench and puts all his artillery on us—H.E. and shrapnel. By the greatest piece of luck he had misjudged where our trench was and put his barrage about 200 yards behind us, probably thinking our supports were there. Terrific din ensues. At the same time Fritz sends up hundreds of different coloured Very lights, sort of rockets, to light up no man's land, so as to see if we are coming across. X—— is in his element, gets out of the trench and has a machine gun put on him and flops down again. It was quite like a show at the Crystal palace and I quite enjoyed it. We didn't suffer any harm and even then I was convulsed with laughter to see the men crouching down and old X——

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hopping around. He is *exactly* like a Bairnsfather stock drawing but quite a nice little man.

In case you don't know what a barrage is, though you ought to, it means 'weir' in French, and is a curtain of fire, all the guns playing on one line and is to prevent supports coming up etc. In a day or so we shall go right back again I hope and I shall be jolly glad to get my clothes off and have a wash. The trenches here are peaceful because neither side has real trenches and they are too shallow and too muddy to hold in the ordinary way. I am getting fed up with living in dug-outs they are very deep and very steep and stink horribly because they never get any ventilation, and are always crowded.

Well, on the whole I am enjoying myself in the trenches this time and I am feeling extremely well and 'merry and bright.' But you have no idea how nice it is getting letters when you are in the trenches. It reminds you that there is a life without all this mud and beastliness —though now it is freezing hard. Hope you are all feeling as fit as I am.

Note.—The two following letters were written from the support trenches a few hours before the attack on the Loupart Wood trenches previous to the taking of Irles.

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March 9, evening.

DEAREST AUNTS—I *have* treated you badly but as you know I am back with the Battn. again and we are in the trenches. We came out of the first line a night or so ago and are in support now. We had a very peaceful time but it was pretty cold and muddy and to-night it is snowing! I had hoped that winter was over. A most excellent cake arrived yesterday from Harrod's from you? If so v. many thanks—very welcome I can assure you in a dirty ditch! I am feeling very well and happy. D.V. I shall get some leave soon, but one feels that one is in God's hands and so can let things come without worrying. I hope your furnishing is getting on well and that I shall come and see you when I get home. Much love to you both.

To his Mother and Father.

March 9, evening.
[Received March 15.]

Snowing to-night! This certainly has been some winter.—We move to-night from the support shelters where we now are and we are all feeling rather peevish!

We have just had dinner cooked by Farndon (my servant) on a brazier and we push off at midnight. Not the best time to start! but still

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it doesn't much matter. It is funny how things take one's mind back. There is a light railway near here and a day or so ago I was standing by it when an engine passed. The smoke blew in my face and I thought I never smelt anything so good in my life. It seemed to bring back the L. & N.W.R.! I hope you have had my Boche helmet and my fur jacket which I sent home though it is government property. I want to make it into a little hearthrug for your room. The quartermaster sergt. is waiting for this letter—so cheer ho—

Telegram received at Milford Hall.

5.24. P.M., March 14, 1917.

Deeply regret to inform you 2nd Lieut. R. B. Levett, King's Royal Rifles, was killed in action on March tenth. The Army Council express their sympathy.

Secretary, War Office.

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ACCOUNT OF 'THE BAPAUME RIDGE' AND THE TAKING OF IRLES. FROM THE 'MORNING POST.'

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EXTRACT FROM THE 'MORNING POST,'
March 12, 1917.

LOUPART WOOD—'THE BAPAUME RIDGE.'

Loupart Wood has become a symbol for the British troops in the new line before Bapaume. The trim border of it rises up before them on a shoulder of the uneven ground thick, compact, apparently unscathed after a long bombardment —an ordinary, cleanly-defined patch of woodland exactly like scores of others set amid the red and white villages of Northern France.

Yet the soldiers stare at these unscathed trees and the broad fields around them as though they had never before looked on a rural landscape, and the reason is that Loupart Wood is the threshold of the 'promised land.' It is a wonderful stimulus for the tired infantryman who has ploughed through the mud and abominations of the Somme battlefield to its farthest side to arrive at last at the end of a fresh fertile countryside. Until over the ridge that hid Bapaume, they lived and fought in a desolate valley amid

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the stark ruins and the bodies of their enemies—a dead world that gave no hope of a world beyond. They fought—they died—splendidly; but without ever seeing the goal for which they strove. The first men who gained the crest and looked down on the towers of Bapaume forgot the tragedy of which they were a part, and cheered. Every man who came after them through the slough of despond was stirred and heartened by the revelation.

To-day, the belt of waste land that is the world's greatest battlefield has been almost traversed by the British troops; some of them are actually beyond this zone, sitting on a slope that is still green between the fresh shell craters —and the 'promised land' has lost nothing of its fairness, now that they have arrived at the very door. Loupart Wood is a symbol because it is the first conspicuous object that arrests the pilgrim's eye as he presses forward. It looks peaceful and very remote from the grim business of war. With the snow clinging to its branches and the winter sun sending slender shafts of light along the narrow lanes beween the trees, it has an air of natural solidity and strength as though immune from all the blasts of Armageddon.

Behind you have a desert sown with the bones of a hundred thousand men; before you

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are farms still under cultivation; houses that were until a few days ago occupied by peasants; churches still roofed and steepled, fields still unpitted by craters and undisfigured by the web of trenches.

Weeks of warfare failed to obliterate the fertile district just south of Bapaume which has just been given up by the harassed occupants. British gunners were skilfully sparing of villages forced by the stress of war into the last line held by them, and so our men, wading laboriously through the noisome swamp, where decaying bodies, rotting timbers and all unimaginable débris of the battlefield were inextricably mingled in the mud, suddenly found themselves treading the more sure surface of a still green field.

You can still see the glint of red roofs above white-washed walls and the unbroken outline of the houses of Le Barque grouped along the country road that did duty as a high street. Even at a short distance the shell of this little hamlet is illusively perfect through the thin screen of trees unshorn by the British shells. Yet the morass immediately before it, once a sunken road, is like nothing else in the wide expanse of blasted trenches, and scarcely a broken stump is lifted above the slime to mark the site of a pleasant country lane. The green

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slope between the houses and the stagnant pools that have swallowed a German fire trench are a record of the accuracy of the British gunners. Thus far their shells went and no further. The fringe of the battlefield is as clear and as precise as if it was laid with a compass. You can step from the foul graveyard into the new world beyond.

The men who search it with their glasses long for the moment when they can leave the dead slopes of the Ancre behind and sweep across the reclaimed valleys of this ' Promised Land.'

Account of the Action in which Dick was Killed.

HOW IRLES WAS TAKEN.

From the ' Morning Post.' Monday, March 12, 1917.

Well-prepared plans of the German Guards and other infantry detachments of the enemy to continue their retirement from the defences above the Ancre into the shorter line before Bapaume were neatly forestalled yesterday morning when we attacked and occupied the remaining fragment of their old positions in front of the Achiet–Loupart Wood trenches.

The strong garrison of this stubbornly-held

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series of outposts around Irles, which embraced some of the ruins of the village and trenches east of it linking up the well-fortified quarry and the adjoining cemetery, had packed their kit and arranged to dismantle their machine guns and trench mortars with which they had maintained their resistance, and awaited the break of day and the signal of their commander to slip across the muddy fields into the Achiet trenches. They were wholly unprepared for the flood of British infantry which, working around both sides of the village, as well as pouring through, cut off their retreat, leaving no alternative but surrender to the survivors of our prefatory bombardment, with their sixteen wholly good machine guns and four trench mortars. Nearly 300 prisoners tramped back through the craters of the enemy's lost ground, and the British casualties consequent on their perfectly executed surprise attack were exceedingly light.

A bombardment with all kinds of explosives during Friday night obviously strengthened the decision of the enemy outposts to abandon their untenable position, but in any case it would have been impossible for them to continue much longer in their irregular salient, which is composed largely of shallow trenches grouped round the fragments of Irles.

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It was not dreamt that the British would attempt any operation on such a damp dark night, for rain had fallen intermittently, and the ground, which was again thawing rapidly, was approaching the consistency of a swamp.

THE ADVANCE.

We advanced on both sides of Irles, each detachment of infantry meeting with little opposition as we captured one post after another. The British detachment working eastward on this side took 140 prisoners, six machine guns and four mortars, whilst their comrades from the north, with whom they afterwards joined in a trench which skirted the eastern face of Irles across Grevillers[1] road, bagged 142 men, two officers and ten machine guns.

This operation gives us all the ground in front of the enemy's Achiet line, the first of two positions still defending Bapaume.

All prisoners admit the terrible character of the British bombardment, which made it impossible to remain longer in defences subjected to concentrated fire.

[1] Dick fell at the Grevillers trench.

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EXTRACTS FROM SOME LETTERS RECEIVED AFTER DICK'S DEATH.

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Extracts from some Letters received after Dick's Death.

Buckingham Palace, March 21, 4.45 P.M.

The King and Queen deeply regret the loss you and the Army have sustained by the death of your son in the service of his country. Their Majesties truly sympathise with you in your sorrow.

Keeper of the Privy Purse.

From Major Stafford, 1st. Batt. K.R.R.C.

You will already have received the War Office telegram informing you of the death of your son. As officer commanding the Battn. at the time of his death, I am writing to offer you the sincerest sympathy of the whole Battn.

Captain Smith has written to give you details. Your son was right under our barrage when he was killed, and there is no doubt that by keeping his men forward, he prevented the machine guns coming into action and thus saved many casualties. In consequence the attack was a brilliant success. Your son was a most charming

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boy and an extremely keen and able officer. One could be absolutely certain that any piece of work given to him would be well done. His place will be very difficult to fill.

When he was attached to the Divisional Company he was always asking to be allowed to come back to the Battn. and was finally allowed to do so, after we had lost many officers on Feby. 17. It makes it all the more sad that he was killed in his first attack. I hope you will accept the most sincere sympathies of us all.

From Captain Smith, Dick's Co. Commander, 1st Batt. K.R.R.C.

I am so awfully sorry for you in your great loss. I knew Dick very well indeed, and as soon as I returned to the Battn. from the 2nd I had a great fight to get him into my company.

I came home from France in June, and on going down to Sheerness in August found that Dick was in my training Company, and we worked together for four months and I got to know him very well indeed. He was one of the most charming boys I have met in the Regiment and a most excellent officer. He had the greatest of all gifts, knowing exactly how to handle his

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men, and I can assure you it is not an easy matter out here where they are often absolutely dead beat.

The attack was an enormous success and we advanced over half a mile, took 110 prisoners, three machine guns and three trench mortars, and the whole loss in the Battn. was only 43 killed and wounded, which is wonderful in these days.

There is no doubt that Dick was killed by our own barrage, in fact nearly all the casualties were caused by our own barrage, but it is impossible to avoid that in this modern warfare and the modern method of attacking, the troops have to follow so closely that the Boche have not time to come out of their dug-outs. There is no doubt that following up the barrage so closely was the reason of there being so little machine gun fire to contend with.

He will be buried with full military honours at Albert to-morrow.

I can assure you we all feel the boy's death very much. It is so awful the way all these wonderful young boys are killed out here. We have lost so many in this Battn. If only he had been spared he had a great future before him.

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From Rifleman Farndon, Dick's Servant.

DEAR MADAM—I now take the opportunity of writing these few lines to offer you my heart-felt sympathy in the great loss of your dear son. I think by now you know the events that led up to the death of one of the best and bravest of our officers. It will be a lifelong sore to me that I was not actually by his side when he fell. His eagerness, the misty weather and bad luck were the cause. He was the best gentleman that I have ever had the pleasure of looking after, and his loss has given me, his servant (who is not entitled to any feeling), one of the hardest knocks of this terrible war. I can only guess at the depth of your feelings in your great loss. I shall be pleased if there is anything I can do for you.

From the Same.

It is hard for me to express my gratitude in words for your most kind and welcome letter of the 15th. No one will ever be able to say that the upper classes have not given their All in this just cause. The best and bravest have given their lives freely. I am not so sure it is us who suffer so much as those who are left to mourn their loss.

Mr. Richard was so unselfish—always think-

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ing of the comforts of his men and was admired and respected by them. They would have followed him anywhere and if possible given their lives to save his. I remember Mr. Richard writing on the night of the 9th. He gave the letters to the Q.M. Sgt. to post for him.

We did leave the support line about midnight and made our way towards our forming up place where we were going over from at 5.15 A.M. Mr. Richard was made to look as much like the men as possible. He wore a jerkin under his web equipment, and carried a rifle and fixed bayonet. He also had sandbags tied over his high knee boots as the Boche snipers are very fond of picking off our officers. Well, madam, our artillery barrage opened at 5.15 sharp and Mr. Richard who went over with the first wave was out of the trench and calling his men on. Everyone was so eager to get at the Boche, that before we had gone 200 yards we were being peppered by our own artillery. We laid down just in front of the enemy's wire for a bit, and then when the barrage lifted, up again. Mr. Richard's last words were 'Are you all right?' I answered yes—and then the word to Charge. Mr. Richard was off like a shot, his orderly and I after him, the barbed wire which I got hung up in was my undoing, the men who had closed together a

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lot, and the mist made everything so confused, and in their eagerness to get to the trenches no one seems to have seen Mr. Richard fall. Of course everybody had to dig like mad to consolidate the trench, and I thinking that Mr. Richard would be along soon (never dreaming that he had been hit) started to clear the entrance of a mine shaft. You can imagine my feelings when our O/C company at that time, told me that he believed Mr. Richard had been killed. I asked him if he had seen Mr. Richard and he said he had not. I asked permission to go and find him which was refused. The Sergt.-Major and I were talking of the possibility of going out together when a Corporal reported to the Captain that he had just seen an officer who looked like Mr. Richard being assisted by two men going back over the top. The Captain then gave me permission to go back after them. I made my way to the dressing station, hoping that the worst was that Mr. Richard had been slightly wounded. No such luck. The officer who had been seen going back was another who had been wounded in the thigh. Poor Mr. Richard's body was found between the German wire and the trench. He had been hit on the head by a piece of shell. They took his body back to Albert where he was buried. He was followed

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by the officers of the Battn. and the men of his company, a very great loss to us all. They buried him as they usually do in his uniform, but our pioneers made him a coffin. It was all very sad, but I am sure the Last Post was never sounded over a braver or a better gentleman. The platoon wish to offer you both their combined sympathy in your great loss.

I remain, yr. most obedient servant,

FARNDON, Rifleman.

From Colonel Villers Stuart.

DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS.

Major Stafford will have told you all about how splendid your son was on the 10th, but you may care to hear of the work he did for me. He was only a boy, as you know: and I gave him a very difficult job to do. He had to organise and look after and improve 3 hut camps. I cannot say too much of his energy, determination, cheerfulness and tact. He was excellent, a really wise and charming head on young shoulders.

From Rifleman Craigie, Dick's Servant at Sheerness.

DEAR MADAM—I only heard of dear Lieut. Levett's fate the day I went on sick leave last

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Monday and Madam all here was very sorry who knew him, but none felt it so much as me that I am certain of, for many nights I used to sit in his bunk and talk with him. Your dear son promised me his photograph in uniform but regret to say have not yet got it. Madam may God help you to bear up under your irreparable loss. I feel certain Lieut. Levett died as he lived, great and noble.

Yours obediently,
Rifleman CRAIGIE.

From Miss Rivet Carnac, the Present Mistress of Dick's old Nurse—'Mother Jack.'

I am writing to you for poor Richin who is quite ill with grief and seems quite unable to reconcile herself to this bitter loss. She hopes you will forgive her for not writing at once but she is quite unable to do so, and now may I add these lines for myself and tell you how very deeply I feel for you all in your great sorrow and how I personally feel your son's loss, and this is shared by those who knew him here. He was a most splendid type of English manhood in every sense of the word, one the country is proud to own and can ill spare. I feel for you with all my heart, but you must indeed feel proud of the boy who died a hero, giving his young

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life for the old country and for the greatest and noblest cause the world has ever known or fought for.

From the President of Magdalen.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD.

It was with shock and pain and most unfeigned sorrow that I saw in the *Times* yesterday the brief sad announcement of the loss of your truly gallant son Richard. What must be your feelings! He was only here one brief term but he made a deep impression on me. I thought him singularly engaging and attractive and amiable. When he left he wrote me a delightful letter and said that his one term was so well worth while and that he should never forget it. I shall not forget him. If you can spare the time and it is not too sad a task will you tell me a little about his career since he left us, and could you spare us a photograph of him. He would, had he been spared, have made some mark and been a most valuable influence.

From the 'Boys' Maid' at 'Stone's.'

DEAR SIR AND MADAM—I saw to-day in the *Eton Chronicle* the notice of your son. I was so saddened almost overwhelmed as I was his

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maid and had him most of the years to look after. Will you allow me in your deep sorrow and great loss to express heartfelt sympathy. He was so kind and good only this Christmas-tide he sent me a collar from France. Was always so good and bright and came to my room when he came in from Sandhurst said he would never forget me. He had splendid manners and *sweet* ways. Saturday he used not to light his fire to save me (his kind thought) which I used to tell him his men would *like*. I met his nurse once at Eton and she said he always treated her nice so she was sure he did me. He often made life brighter for me by his kind thoughtfulness.

Yours faithfully,

ANNA GREGORY.

From A. J. Richardson.

ST. PETER'S COURT.

It was with the deepest sorrow that we heard that your dear Dick had fallen. . . . I feel that he never can have given you a moment of anxiety in his short life and that his charming and sweet disposition will always live for you, and the memory of what he was will some day blot out the inevitable thoughts of what might have been. . . . It is true that he was delicate

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and unathletic as a small boy but we never thought that his physical weakness would spoil his life, for we could see even in those early days a depth of character unusual in so young a boy. Dick had a serious way of looking right through you when he talked, and I believe I often felt when talking to him that I was in the presence of a superior. His life showed that this was a very true impression.

From Captain Johnson, 'The King of Aveluy.'

CLIFTON GARDENS, GOLDERS GREEN.

Your letter has just reached me as I am lucky enough to be at home on leave.

Your son was in my mess for about two months and I felt his death very much, and can realise a little what it means to you as I could see he was an only beloved son, and I know he felt all the love you and others gave him as he filled up most of his spare time writing letters home. He was a young man who deserved the best wishes of us all and I expressed it in saying, 'I hope one day my son would grow up like him.' Like all lovable people he had his faults but he was always humorous and appreciated what you did to please him. We lived together, four of us sleeping in a cellar,

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and of course your boy 'got up last.' He worked well, but loved his bed in the morning as well as 'crusts.' He called me 'King of Aveluy' as I was mess president and laid down the law. I am afraid, sitting at head of the table.

You know of course how he died, during one of our pushes which was almost the start of the glorious work now going on and I can assure you his death was absolutely instantaneous, and if death has to come then the only one to be desired just doing his duty and giving his all like so many of our old families.

I have kept two books of your son's and will post them to you when I get to France. The name of one is a coincidence, 'The End of a Chapter,' a tale of Eton life, and that is all his death will mean to you, I hope, as I can tell you feel, however sad our personal affairs may be, it is 'only a chapter,' and the world should be a better place for all these sacrifices that have been given up for us.

Three Letters from Madame Magnier.

NOYELLES EN CHAUSSÉE, PAR CRÉCY, SOMME.[1]

MADAME—Tout d'abord je vous prie de m'excuser de n'avoir pas répondu de suite au

[1] See p. 92.

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gentil souvenir que vous m'avez envoyé et que j'ai reçu samedi, je vous en remercie beaucoup. Madame, je conserve bien précieusement ce souvenir qui m'est d'autant plus cher qu'il vient d'une Mère Anglaise.

Je regrette bien Madame de n'avoir pu conserver Monsieur votre fils plus longtemps avec moi, des son arrivée chez moi il a su de suite conquérir mon estime, car j'ai vu que c'était un enfant bien élevé, bien doux et j'aurais bien voulu qu'il reste plus longtemps près de moi, malheureusement au bout de trois jours il a dû nous quitter. Ce matin il m'a envoyé une gentille lettre toute en Français, à laquelle j'ai répondu tout à l'heure. Je peuse qu'il me donnera de temps en temps de ses nouvelles qui me ferront bien plaisir. Peut-être allez-vous me trouvez exigeante, mais je vais cependant me permettre de vous demander quelque chose : Serait-ce vous demander trop si je vous demandais la photographie de Monsieur votre fils si cela ne vous derange trop. J'ai souvent dans les yeux, la photographie vivante de Monsieur votre fils, mais à mon âge la mémoire me fait défaut aussi c'est pourquoi je vous réclame sa photographie, aussi mimine sera-t-elle soyez certaine Madame, qu'elle me fera plaisir et durant ma vie je l'aurai devant les yeux.

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Je vous écris en Français, Monsieur votre fils m'a dit que Mademoiselle sa sœur connaissait bien notre langue.

En vous remerciant encore une fois Madame, pour votre gentil souvenir et espérant que vous me donnerez encore bientôt de vos nouvelles, recevez Madame aussi que votre famille, mon respecteux souvenir.

H. MAGNIER.

From the Same.

CHÈRE MADAME—Je ne veux pas tarder à répondre à votre lettre que je viens de recevoir, aussi que la photographie que vous m'avez envoyé et que m'a bien fait plaisir. Je n'ai pas eu du tout de peine à reconnaître Monsieur votre fils, c'est bien la figure douce que j'ai connue lorsqu'il était ici, c'est pour moi un precieux souvenir. Je serais heureuse que dans votre prochaine lettre vous me donniez de ses nouvelles car il y a bien longtemps que je n'ai pas reçu de lettre de lui—il était à ce moment-là aux trenchées ou il me disait qu'il se trouvait près d'un de mes neveux.

Recevez chère Madame, l'assurance de ma meilleur amitié,

H. MAGNIER.

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From the Same.

CHÈRE MADAME—C'est avec le cœur rempli de tristesse et les larmes aux yeux que j'essaie de vous écrire et que j'ai appris la mort de Monsieur votre fils, de cet enfant que j'ai à peine connu, mais dont j'avais su apprécier les grandes qualités. Il avait sur le cœur cette affection sincère que le faisait aimer sans le connaître, il était de ceux qu'on ne peut oublier. Pour vous Madame c'est une perte irréparable aussi pour Monsieur et Mademoiselle. Pleurons ensemble chers amis votre enfant martyr de la guerre, prions pour lui car c'est un enfant brav que nous ne retrouverons que dans l'éternité.

Monsieur est arrivé chez moi la veille de Nouvel An qui était un Dimanche. Le Lundi il est allé à Crécy pour visiter les monuments historique qui s'y trouvent. Avant de partir je lui donnais à manger de gâteau. Le mardi il a demandé pour manger chez moi, le messe ne lui plaisait pas. Je lui dis 'Je veux bien Monsieur mais je ne sais que vous donner,' il me repond 'Je ne suis pas difficile, votre cuisine me parait bonne.' Je vous assure Madame que j'étais heureuse. Je lui donnais ce que j'avais de meilleur. Il a visité la maison du grenier à la cave. 'Je l'admirais,' il me disait. 'Je n'ai encore rencontré

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personne pour me faire autant d'accueil, soyez certaine que si je reviens de cette guerre je viendrais vous voir avec mes parents en auto. Voyez, ma mere a coupé un doigt de son gant et la rempli d'objets precieux.' En partant il me dit, 'Vous priez le bon Dieu pour moi, si j'étais tué mes parents n'auraient plus de fils,' et quel éloge it faisait de sa sœur. Pauvre enfant que je regrette!

Recevez chère Madame, mes plus sincères condoléances,

H. MAGNIER.

From the Rev. L. Cappell, C.F.

I have just heard of Dick's death on March 10. I have had a great shock. I cannot forget the fine soldierly lad who came in to see me at Cromwell Huts on the Ancre. He was just the same old frank Dick and the sight of him cheered me up.

Dick spoke to me of two or three other fellows whom he had known who had given their all and he remarked they were only sons also, but he remarked we could only do our bit and that was all that God expected of us.

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I had a little quiet talk with him alone in the hut and his grip of the meaning of life and death was splendid.

His clean young life looked out of his eyes and met you in his smile till one felt it was good to see him.

We had been shelled severely the night before in our hut and I could not help telling him just how I felt and how there had grown in me such a sense of protection that I felt my activity would not lessen even if I were removed beyond by one of them—and he told me how he was helped by the prayers of all at home and what confidence they gave him.

His was a vital religion, one that *worked*. And though the 'after' did not loom largely before his mind as in any normally healthy young fellow, I could feel that the good present was for him part of the good future and there lies our comfort in our distress.

That communion which was so distinctive a part of Dick's relationships with those he loved is of the eternal things of life and continues. His campaign goes on against what is wrong and base in all our affairs and will persist as all that is good does, once it is created.

As one looks round and thinks of the men whom one meets, I cannot but feel Dick had

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graduated for the higher work which God reserves for the specially trained. So he will help you to bear his going by a spiritual presence, real, almost tangible.

Of all those who have had links with Dick's boyhood I think I was the last to see and speak to him. It seems but the other day we played 'Red Indians' in 'Ceylon,' only the other day that I learnt to love 'Alice in Wonderland' through reading it to him—and to-day I see his name in the Roll of Honour. These times and scenes make one grow old, old, and the sadness of farewell for a little dims our sense of the joyousness of their *welfare* with God, but we know we shall meet, some sooner, some later with those we have cared for, by whose side we have done our bit, so we must leave it all in God's hands and hope on. I am much with you in your great grief and so thankful that I was granted the joy of seeing Dick.

From E. C.

Your boy is in my heart to-day and that is my only excuse for troubling you with a letter, that we all loved Dick. He was one of the finest gentlemen I have ever met. But because you have had more than most you have the

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greater sorrow, none the less that it is a very proud sorrow.

For Dick himself his shining soul has only gone home. There will be no strangeness there, but now the world to you must seem utterly empty. May God who spared not His own Son give you comfort and strength. With all tender sympathy.

Yours ever,

E. C.

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EXTRACTS FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY DICK TO BE GIVEN TO HIS PARENTS IN THE EVENT OF HIS DEATH.

MILFORD, November 1916.

To-night is probably the last night I shall be at Milford before going to the front and I am writing this in case I don't come back.

I know how much you will feel it if I go under but don't forget that I shall have died for the best cause a man could have died for and as long as my death has been worthy of a Levett and a Rifleman you must only feel proud and happy.

Thanks to you both my life has been an extraordinarily happy one and by a death comparatively young I shall be spared ever having to pass through any unhappiness.

After all, if I had lived a longer life what should I have done? What my grandfathers did before me: lived at Milford, made alterations in the garden and died in the 'Red room,' and except to my successors I should have been to the rest

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of humanity one of the countless millions who live and die without having done anything to make the world better or worse.

Now by my death I have been allowed to do more than that and to pay our share of a great debt.

I particularly want everything to go on at Milford as if I was coming back one day: you know how fond of the place I was and I should hate to think that the old place was suffering through the break in one generation so please do everything as if I was away for a time only, and in every way keep the family traditions going.

That is one of the saddest things in the war, the way so many traditions have lapsed.

I don't want any mourning or anything to be disarranged for me.

Do what you like with any of my things. Put one set of uniform in the oak chest and let the R. B. L. of the future dress up in it when he wants to. Put any of my letters which you think worth keeping or which might be interesting in the future in the 3rd drawer of the burry which was in Granny's bedroom and is now in your new sitting-room, so that they may be with the other old letters and papers which I have

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collected and put there. I feel sorry that I shan't find them thirty years hence! Your loss of an only son and a successor is very great but carry on and God bless you my dearest parents.

Ever your loving and happy son,

R. B. LEVETT.

FLOREAT ETONA.

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EPILOGUE.

The following Prayer was copied by Dick into a Book of Devotions given to him at his Confirmation by his old nurse, and found in his 'burry' amongst his treasures after his death.

As a mother, I would commend it to the thoughtful consideration of any boy who may read these Letters, trusting that to each one may come as full and perfect an answer in God's own way.

M. S. L.

Prayer.

O Almighty and Eternal Father, I thank Thee that Thou dost at this time vouchsafe to me the gift of Thy Holy Spirit. Grant to me, Lord, that I may see and know what service Thou dost call me to render to Thy children, that I may fulfil Thy will, in glad and faithful obedience, to my life's end.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

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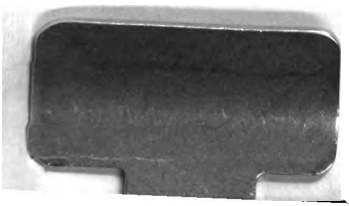

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